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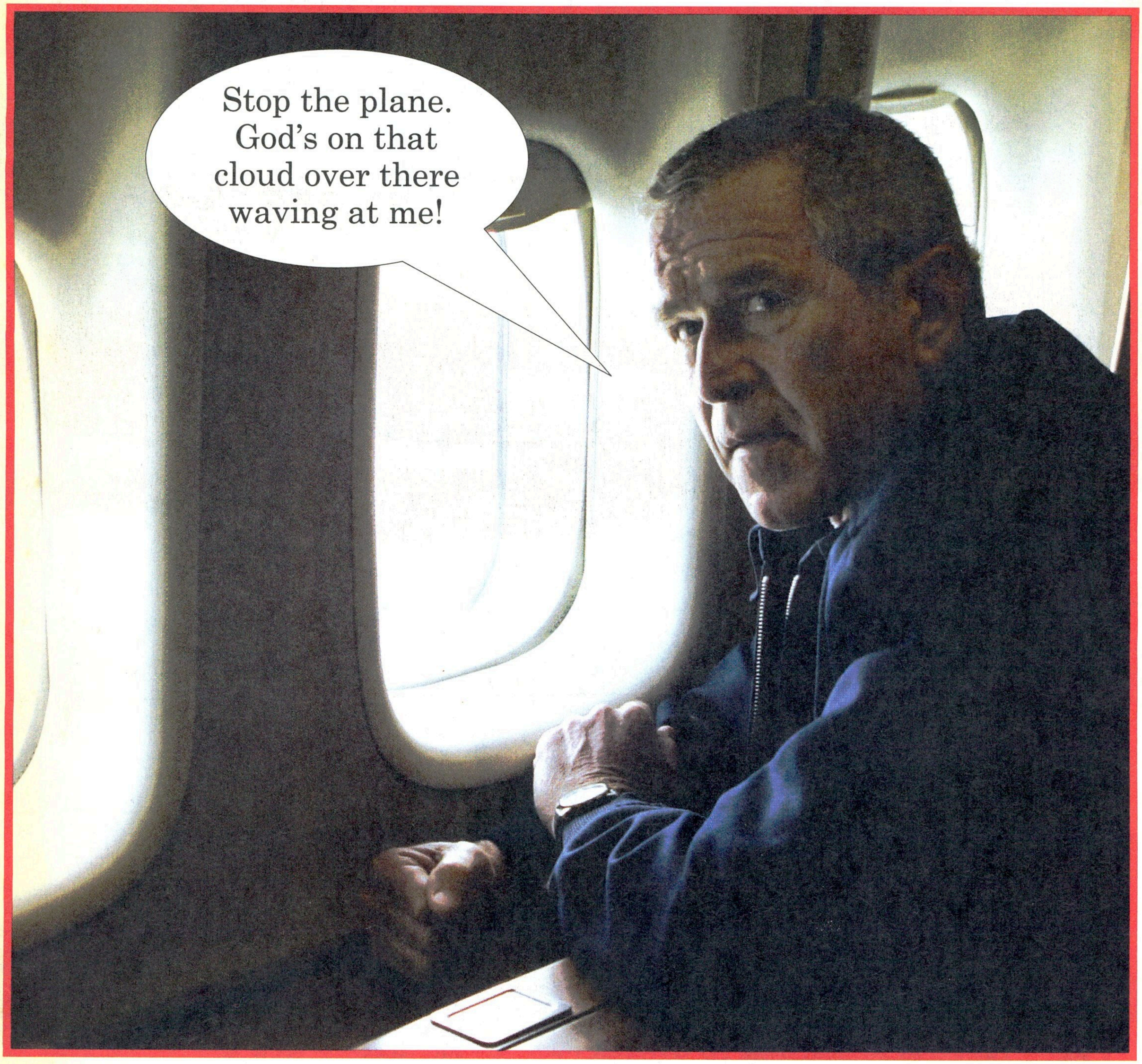

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INTRODUCING YOUR NEW-LOOK Daily Gnomegraph

A personal letter from Martin Strobeland, Editor of the Daily Gnomegraph *(for the time being)*

Dear Reader,

It's all change here at the *Daily Gnomegraph* as we strive to make our product exactly the same as it was before. Let me take you through some of the exciting changes to your favourite newspaper.

NEWS The same as before only more so!

BUSINESS Where it's always been!

CROSSWORD As cryptic as ever!

BILL DEEDES The world's oldest columnist – still there!

TV'S CHARLES MOORE He's back – even though he's never been away.

LIZ HURLEY – Phwoar!

PAGE 94 – Now relocated to an exciting new spot between pages 93 and 95! *(That's enough changes.)*

I hope you like it. My boss (Daly McMail, the Chief Executive) tells me it's great, and that's good enough for me!

Martin Strobeland

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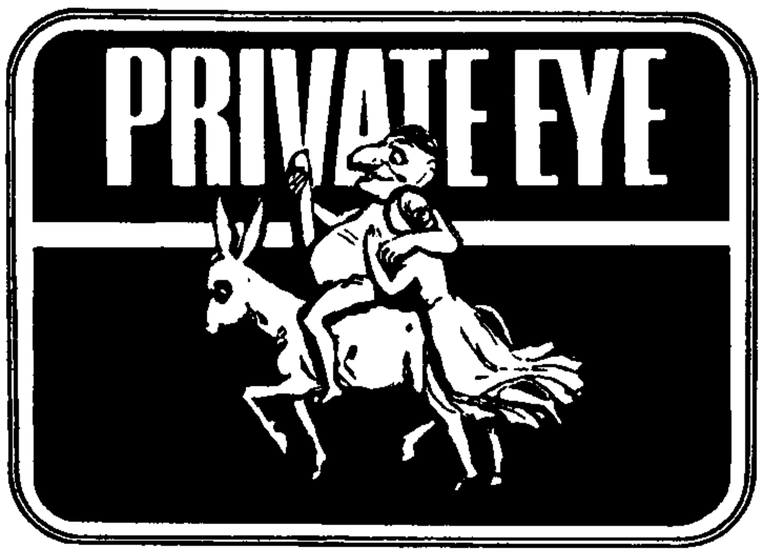

Divine inspiration

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BALFOUR Beatty's £10m fine for its role in the fatal Hatfield train crash repeats the familiar pattern of a negligent company causing deaths but paying only a relatively small penalty (Balfour made £200m profit last year) while nobody is held to account.

But who, apart from the political architects of rail privatisation, was responsible for what Mr Justice Mackay described as "one of the worst examples of sustained industrial negligence in a high risk industry"?

The chief executive of Balfour Beatty as it neglected safety over the years leading up to the disaster was one Mike Welton, who remained in his position collecting around half a million pounds a year plus bonuses until he retired in 2004 with a further £160,000 pay-off. He now coins it in as chairman of aggregates company Hanson.

That isn't the only use to which Welton puts his invaluable experience. In August 2001, a mere ten months after Hatfied, he was made chairman of the government's railway sector advisory group which, among other things, tries to flog rail privatisation to other countries.

Balfour has also prospered since the crash. Shortly afterwards, as part of the Metronet consortium, it won one of the PPP contracts to upgrade and maintain the tube network. Profits from the deal already dwarf the £10m fine.

WOULD-BE Tory leader David Cameron's conference speech contained a heart-warming pledge to the parents of children with special needs.

"Just imagine what it is like when the special school that gives their child the love they need, the care they need, the therapy they need and, yes, the education they need, when that special school is threatened with closure. I've seen it, and it breaks my heart," he told the party faithful. "That's why a Conservative government will save special schools."

Really Mr Cameron? The Tory party's flagship council, Wandsworth, plans to close the highly successful Chartfield school in west Putney in July 2006.

Chartfield is the only school in London catering for high-functioning special needs pupils, serving children with autism, epilepsy, communication problems and other difficulties from all over the city. Many of its students have gone on to higher education and parents fought a hard campaign against the closure.

In 2003 Wandsworth was taken to the high court for failing to make even the most basic provision for disabled children (*Eyes passim*). Twenty-four families had to fight to get the educational services, such as speech therapy, that their children's statements of need said they were entitled to. Compassionate conservatism indeed.

NOT even a law forbidding the sale of government buildings in Northern Ireland can stop the nation's family silver being flogged off in PFI property deals, it seems.

The 1933 Stormont estates act forbids the sale of buildings within Belfast's Stormont estate, where much of the province's senior civil service works. In September, however, Lord Rooker announced that the government would go full speed ahead with plans to sell off, then lease back, 88 government buildings, including Castle Buildings where the Good Friday agreement was signed, the main civil service offices and 40 jobs and benefits offices across Northern Ireland. The law will simply be changed to allow it.

While the legislation is fixed, companies are already lining up for the £1.5bn deal. According to *Estates Gazette*, two consortia of firms based in Northern Ireland are likely to compete against giants such as Land Securities Trillium and our old chums at Mapeley, the Bermudan outfit which, thanks to the disaster-ridden STEPS PFI deal (see *Eyes passim*), bought up Britain's tax offices while based in an offshore tax haven!

JUST FANCY THAT!

BBC Radio 4 interviewer: "How can the Tory party appeal to women?"

Kenneth Clarke MP: "We've got to keep our message very simple."

LEEDS Mental Health NHS Teaching Trust has suspended health and safety rep Paul Cockcroft just days before he was to appear before Leeds city council scrutiny committee to answer questions about fire safety at three new mental health units built under PFI (*Eye* 1138).

The trust's management also failed to pass on an invitation to attend the scrutiny committee to Chris Hindle, the fire officer at the trust who has previously described the units as "not suitable for people with mental health problems".

Chief executive Chris Butler came in for a hard time at the trust's recent AGM over three safety reports commissioned in 2005. He did not dispute that they cost taxpayers a sum rumoured to exceed five figures, found problems with "documentation, design, construction, operation and management" (ie everything) and simply confirmed what a previous report from Hindle had told the trust in 2004.

GUEST of honour at Moorfield Eye Hospital's open day to celebrate its 200th anniversary last weekend was none other than Richard Desmond.

Naturally this was because of the extensive philanthropic donations the *Express* boss has made to the hospital and to other blindness charities, rather than the number of patients who have ended up needing treatment there after overindulging in his pay-per-view porn TV channels…

CABINET BACKS BLUNKETT

Street of Shame

THE office of fair trading (OFT) should by now have published its final opinion on the newspaper and magazine distribution agreements that it indicated were anti-competitive because they force retailers to use a single wholesaler.

Tearing up the arrangements could send thousands of small circulation magazines and independent newsagents to the wall (see *Eye* 1135) and is opposed by almost everyone – apart from the big retail chains. Tesco in particular wants the change as a way to get its massive deliveries more cheaply.

The announcement was scheduled for the end of September. A couple of days before then, OFT officials even assured industry representatives its decision would be given the following morning. But nothing happened. Why not?

Surely not because OFT director-general Sir John Vickers was retiring on the 30th and didn't fancy bowing out to the widely predicted jeers that a decision against the distribution agreements would have brought his way? Whatever the reason, the hold-up lands the chief executive and chairman who take over from him with a tricky first job. Neither will want to sign off the decision without examining it closely, which means more delay and uncertainty. Nor will the new men be able to turn for advice to the man who led the OFT's review, Becket McGrath. In August McGrath left to become a partner in the competition practice of law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner, one of whose major clients is… Tesco.

AFTER the shooting of sales assistant Clare Bernal in Harvey Nichols in September the tabloids embarked on a frenzy of criticism of the court which had granted bail to her killer, Michael Pech, on a charge of harassment, freeing him to attack his victim.

None was more assiduous than the *Evening Standard*, who tracked down the magistrates concerned, published enough personal information for anyone to find their addresses, and printed a far-from-flattering picture of the female member of the bench, Jan Blackburn. The headline summed it up: WOMAN WHO FREED HARVEY NICKS KILLER.

As the *Standard* knows, magistrates, mostly unpaid volunteers, are barred from responding to public criticism of their judgments and have no mechanism to defend themselves. Moreover, the facts of the case are rather inconvenient: without the benefit of hindsight, the bench had virtually no legal grounds to refuse Pech's release.

Pech had no record of missing hearings and, as the *Standard* now concedes, the prosecution offered no suggestion that he was a threat and did not oppose bail.

And that unflattering picture? The *Standard* photographer ambushed the magistrate at home. She was in fact in tears having endured days of er... harassment from hacks camped on her doorstep. Hurrah for trial by tabloid!

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Sven Goran Eriksson has kept faith with out-of-form Rio Ferdinand and left Sol Campbell out in the cold."

– John Cross, Daily Mirror, *6 October.*

"Sven Goran Eriksson has sensationally axed Rio Ferdinand from tomorrow's must-win World Cup qualifier with Austria. Eriksson will recall Sol Campbell to the heart of England's defence."

– John Cross, Daily Mirror, *7 October*

PLUMMETING morale at the *Daily Telegraph* where the decline in the number of general reporters has been matched only by the rise in newly-recruited and highly-paid executives and columnists.

Simon Heffer is one such new arrival. The former *Daily Mail* political commentator has already endeared himself to *Torygraph* admin staff by ringing up with pompous demands for a secretary and an office positioned strategically close to the comment editor. On a recent visit to the Commons, he told the paper's lobby hacks he would be spearheading the *Telegraph*'s political coverage from now on.

Meanwhile, new deputy editor Will Lewis, brought in from the *Sunday Times* at a reported £225,000 a year, has made a strong first impression on his underlings by asking them to work six day weeks and cancel all leave in the run-up to the relaunch of the paper.

The first part of this relaunch has now been unveiled and editor Martin Newland could barely contain his delight, even though the revamped paper looks almost completely identical to the old one. "I believe that in a quality market that is generally dumbing down, the *Telegraph* increasingly comes into its own as the national standard in quality print journalism," he told readers in a personal message on Monday.

And how! Just five pages into the all-nu *Tottygraph* came a large picture of the actress Emma Thompson "showing her elegant side… in a striking blue dress by the designer Tashia and shoes by Jimmy Choo", and a report on how "David Beckham revealed his concern for the health of his son Romeo at the weekend".

WHY has Fleet Street been so coy about the contents of former Tory treasurer Michael Ashcroft's extraordinary self-published 300-page rant, *Dirty Politics, Dirty Times: My fight with Wapping and New Labour*?

The *Evening Standard* referred on three occasions to "a senior *Times* journalist's colourful recreational habits" and made reference to "runny-nosed Tom Baldwin"; while the *Independent* preferred to call it "an unsavoury revelation" with which the name of Giles Coren had been associated. The *Sunday Telegraph* was more specific – "there has been much excitable chatter about the *Times* journalist outed as a cocaine-taker" – while the *Daily Mail* upped the number to three (though it was quick to point out that they had merely "been present when cocaine was snorted", possibly by someone else entirely). To clear up any confusion, Private Eye is happy as a public service to reprint what Ashcroft actually wrote:

"The second footnote concerns Tom Baldwin's cocaine habit, which regrettably seems to have become more serious in recent years. Indeed, during the Conservative Party conference in October 2001, he put Peter Stothard's suite at the Imperial Hotel to 'good' use when his editor was unable to make it to the conference as planned. In the company of two journalist colleagues – Giles Coren and Alice Miles – Baldwin snorted lines of cocaine from the glass coffee table in Stothard's suite. I certainly have no evidence that his colleagues took the drug, but I am told that Baldwin's appetite for it was voracious and also that at least one colleague reprimanded him for his stupidity, saying: 'What the hell do you think you are doing, Tom?'"

Surely Lord Ashcroft should be on the receiving end of some writs this time instead of handing them out?

BAD news at the *Liverpool Daily Post* where budget cuts enforced by owners Trinity Mirror mean the paper has slashed its arts coverage to four pages a week plus a vastly reduced supplement.

The cuts seem especially unfortunate when the paper has been noisily trumpeting Liverpool's latest achievement – winning the coveted title of European City of Culture 2008.

GRAUNIAD editor Alan Rusbridger recently told the trade press: "I continue to believe that news is at the heart of a newspaper." But how long before his paper misses a major news story?

The much-hyped Berliner presses cost a whopping £80m but are currently so unwieldy that page deadlines have had to be brought forward drastically. Many stories have to be with the newsdesk by 3pm and the main final deadline is 5pm.

Any major news items – political coups, terrorist bombs, natural disasters, etc – that happen later in the evening would at the moment go uncovered. Experienced newsroom hands are muttering about a disaster waiting to happen.

A SPARKLING combination of frosted glass and lino has been installed in the lifts at the *Daily Mail* in Kensington. So what was wrong with the carpeted floor and walls that were stripped out?

Word at the *Mail* is that sensitive editor Paul Dacre had become fed up ascending to his office and reading messages from devoted staff saying "FUCK OFF DACRE" scratched into the carpeting on the walls. Hence the interior decorators were told to find something people couldn't write in.

CONGRATULATIONS to Kiki King, finally promoted to be one of the *Daily Mirror*'s official 3am girls with a promise that "it's going to be a lot of fun. And those naughty celebs had better watch their backs". And, it would seem, their fronts.

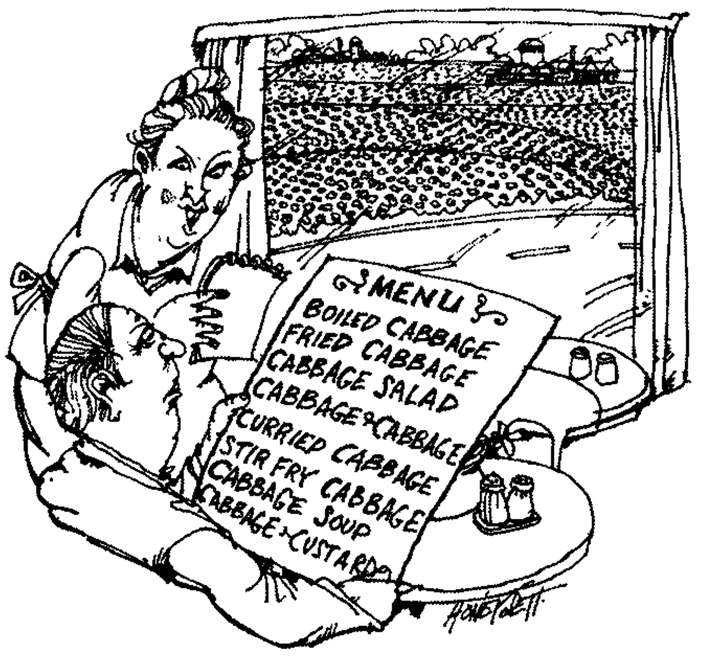
During her last stint behind the scenes at the column two years ago, King's biggest scoop was that Lee Ryan, singer in boy band Blue, had "snagged the woman of his dreams" – a story which was easy to source, given that the woman in question was… Kiki King, who was quoted in 3am blushingly informing herself that "I'm not the kind of girl who kisses and tells, but let's just say I'm definitely going to be seeing him again", (see *Eye* 1106).

She was not lying. Two weeks ago her first day back at the *Mirror* was celebrated with a huge glamorous photo spread introducing "the new face of 3am" – and a lengthy report from a Dolce & Gabanna party in Milan beneath another new byline: "Blue's Lee Ryan writes for 3am."

"CHILDREN face new fat tests at school," exclaimed the *Doncaster Free Press* recently, reporting plans by the local primary care trust to tackle "rocketing" obesity.

Doncaster GPs are worried about rising levels of both weight and diabetes. But alongside this front-page story was a large photo of little girls clutching a huge pile of chocolates, captioned: "Why do these little girls look so happy? Turn to page 6 to find out."

On page 6 all was revealed. The girls had won top prize in the *Doncaster Free Press*'s Golden Ticket competition – £150 worth of chocolate!



"We like to source all our food locally"

THE *Sunset Times* revealed how government energy adviser Ian Fells had allowed himself to get involved with the rogues behind the "green energy" company Pure Energy and Power Ltd. But it was less forthcoming about another key adviser to the dodgy company, Alex Marunchak, who happens to be a senior executive at its sister paper, the *News of the Screws*.

Marunchak is billed as a consultant in Pure's glossy prospectus that promised "ethical" investment. "Alex is the editor of a leading national newspaper with wide industry experience and extensive media connections. He also has substantial political and commercial contacts so as to advance the profile of the company and its business," it says.

The prospectus also describes one of the company's founding rogues, John Rees, as a businessman who set up a "successful private investigation company". *Eye* readers will know him better as Jonathan Rees, the private eye at the *centre of allegations* of involvement with bent Metropolitan coppers in the 1987 axe murder of his partner, Daniel Morgan (see *Eyes passim*), and a man who served seven years for planting drugs on a client's wife.

Marunchak knew Rees from his days as a reporter for the *News of the World* in the 1980s. They stayed in contact and as Marunchak climbed the greasy pole at Murdoch's Wapping HQ, Rees's investigation firm, Law & Commerical, was hired to work alongside staff including Mansoor Mahmood, the fake sheikh, in a number of exposés.

The relationship appears to have broken down over money; but Marunchak stayed in touch and apparently agreed to lend his name to the green energy project which Rees set up with serial fraudster Ronnie Nathan when he came out of prison. To overcome these hurdles to starting up a business, Nathan registered at Companies House under a new name. Knacker may soon be asking Marunchak, as well as the others involved with Pure Energy, how Nathan, a struck-off solicitor and disqualified director operating under a false identity, was considered a suitable chairman.

In The Courts

A WOMAN has been landed with £500 court costs after a letter telling her the date of her employment tribunal hearing apparently got lost in the post.

Last year *Eye* reader Ms X submitted a case against her former employer, Keighley College, for unfair constructive dismissal. The first she heard of the date of the pre-hearing review in Leeds was when she received a letter telling her that the review had already taken place in her absence, that the case had been struck out and that she had to pay costs. She also now faces a £1,600 bill from her own lawyers and has lost the chance to put her case for unfair dismissal.

When Ms X complained to the employment tribunal service (ETS) she was told the original letter informing her of the tribunal date had gone out first class (but not registered or recorded) and that it had not been returned as undelivered mail. The rules say that any letter sent is taken to have been received, unless proven otherwise. This is hardly a fair assumption, given that, according to Royal Mail's own figures, 15 million items of mail were lost last year.

While the tribunal service is refusing to reconsider her case, the Royal Mail has cleared its conscience by giving her a book of stamps as "a goodwill gesture".

As a single man, Blunkett is, of course, entitled to see whoever he wants.

Daily Mail

HACKWATCH

Mother Courage

HOLD the features page! Call the childminder and tell her we'll be working late! Mother's Place is In The Home, says Expert! The mere fact that Penelope Leach actually said nothing of the sort – and in fact insisted in her speech to the National Childminding Association that her study of developmental tests on under threes, which is still at the peer review stage, "should not be interpreted as yet another stick with which to beat working mothers", did not stop every Polly and Glenda in Fleet Street from wading in to what the *Times* called "the mother of all debates".

"This week, working mothers have been beaten over the head with a large stick", huffed the *Sun*'s **Jane Moore**. "No prizes for guessing that working fathers weren't mentioned… So let's get this straight. If you're a single mother who stays at home and lives off the state, that's bad. And if you're a single mother who goes out to work so you don't have to take handouts then that's bad, too, because you're not there full time for your child."

And Moore knows, because she's got three kids. And, curiously enough, three jobs, as a columnist, TV presenter and novelist, although she did give up her radio show when she had her last baby, so she can definitely empathise. Why, it was only a couple of weeks ago that she was expressing sisterhood with "frail little thing" Gail Porter and her difficulties with motherhood: "Suddenly flying abroad at a moment's notice is a thing of the past. Nannies have to be flown along too and nappies packed. Or you leave baby at home and spend the entire trip feeling guilty."

"Well, that's all right then," huffed **Vanessa Feltz** in the *Express*. "All Britain's working mums should hereby down tools, right now on this Tuesday morning, and walk out of boardrooms, classrooms, offices, hospitals, libraries, laboratories and factories, sweep their infants out of nurseries and into their arms and get down to the serious business of teaching them 'Twinkle, twinkle.'"

As usual Feltz manages to bring the topic round to herself within four paragraphs. "What if there is no daddy to pay the bills for light and heat to keep Baby Bunting and mummy warm? What if he has scarpered, the relationship imploded or he lives somewhere else with another lady and his other babies?"

Back in the *Sun*, **Anila Baig** had some good news. "Oh joy – I have become an Auntie! My brother and his wife have had a lovely little girl… I can give them lots of advice having brought up one of my own." But don't fear, readers, she's going to share it with you, too. "As research out this week claims, I believed that a mother's place was with her child… but being cooped up with ME was the worst start in life for my boy. My advice now is this: staying home with baby really is like being offered drugs. Just say NO!"

No such qualms at the *Daily Mail,* which had a case study to prove that it is entirely possible to be a stay-at-home mum: "Julia Sheard, 42, helps her children boost their literacy and numeracy skills at home… They also enjoy fun days out together during the school holidays which would have been tricky to organise if she was still working." The paper does, however, fail to make clear whether the fact that both Mrs Sheard and her husband are trained chartered accountants might have any relevance to their lifestyle choice. But more importantly, Ms Leach's study provided a stick to beat the government with: "The results of the Families, Children and Childcare project fly in the face of Government strategy since Labour came to power in 1997."

However there was much harrumphing behind the scenes since many of the *Mail*'s women reporters have children and work long hours of the type their newspaper disapproves of – Lisa Collins, the editor of er, Femail being a classic case. The *Times*, meanwhile, seemed unsure what line to take on the matter (possibly

"Ohmigod! She just said her first 'Ohmigod'!"

because Alastair Campbell had failed to phone them up and tell them). Instead the paper devoted no fewer than four pages to maternal reminiscences, beneath the magnficently bored introduction "Penelope Leach has reignited the argument over working mothers. *Times* writers join in." "My generation of mid-thirties women grew up in the bad-assed Eighties", pointed out **Sarah Vine**. "Our female role models had shoulder pads, vests with scary poppers between the legs and hair as big as their attitude. These women were making it in a man's world – and to succeed, they had to think like men." The result? "I can't be the only one who thinks, as I close the front door on a Monday morning, 'Yippee! A whole day without banana in my hair'."

Fiona Gorman opted for the other bad stand-up routine – "I just always felt like an Army drill sergeant trying to ensure that people, provisions, possessions were where they should be: husband (clean shirt), boys (food for supper, swimming/ football kit) – quick march!" – while **Carol Midgley** staked the claim of her own offspring to the *Times* junior mastermind title currently held by the younger Siegharts – "Though I hate to be a boastful mother, my child's vocabulary is way more advanced than other children her age not at nursery. Watching her laughing and hugging her friends, I can't say she looks emotionally stunted. She is confident, loving and sociable and the nursery staff have taught her excellent table manners".

In the smugness stakes, however, Midgley came a poor third to **Emma Thompson** (not the actress), who informed thrilled *Times* readers that "I'm much happier sitting here in my jeans at my PC, because writing is a flexible job. I'll have finished by lunchtime – then I'll sling the spag bol together, pick up seven children from school and have five here for tea" – and **Jane Wheatley**, with her pastoral reminiscences of how "we moved to the country, I had more babies and recruited live-in nannies. Not working full-time, yet having a full-time nanny, meant that I could do things with them individually – gym, playgroup, shoe-buying – without dragging them all along every time."

Last word must go to Penelope Leach herself, who, interviewed in the *Mail* on Tuesday, "looks weary and becomes rather cross when people accuse her of being unsympathetic to working mothers… 'People often misinterpret what I'm saying' she says tetchily…. 'It makes me mad when people say, even today, that in an ideal world mothers would be at home full time.'"

JUST FANCY THAT!

"[Peter] Crouch's height seems to invite clichés."

– *Paul Wilson,* Observer Sports Section, *p. 1, 9 October.*

"It is an irony as towering as Peter Crouch that David Beckham should be sent off..."

– *Kevin Mitchell,* Observer Sports Section, *p. 3, 9 October.*

HEALTH PRIVATISATION SPECIAL

ANY DOUBTS that the government is rushing towards wholesale privatisation of the health service were silenced last week by the leaking of documents concerning the transfer of an NHS orthopaedic hospital to the control of an American private outfit.

The government isn't simply handing a successful new NHS facility, the South West London Elective Orthopaedic Centre (SWLEOC) in Epsom, to private interests based in New York; it is also in effect underwriting the operation to ensure it is a success.

The department of health will provide support and advice from its "commercial division", pay legal costs and provide a project manager, as well as underwrite any additional costs that might fall on the primary health care trusts as a result of the transfer.

The aim is supposedly to provide alternatives to the NHS in line with its "patients' choice". But what will the NHS alternative be when its best services have been hived off?

Further papers leaked to the *Eye* show that the government's "flagship" foundation hospitals are also pursuing a policy of complete privatisation of clinical staff and services using the same models developed for the private finance initiative (PFI).

For example, University College London Hospital (UCLH) is, like others, looking to parcel up the profitable elements of NHS care and, with a private partner, sub-contract out those services under a shell company. One UCLH proposal is to link up with UK-based Nations Imaging to provide a diagnostic imaging service covering a large area of London north of the river. It is also talking to an American medical centre about providing "a comprehensive strategy for cancer services in London and the home counties".

Labour's claim that the private sector is simply being used for clinical services to add new capacity, rather than take it away from the NHS, is clearly nonsense.

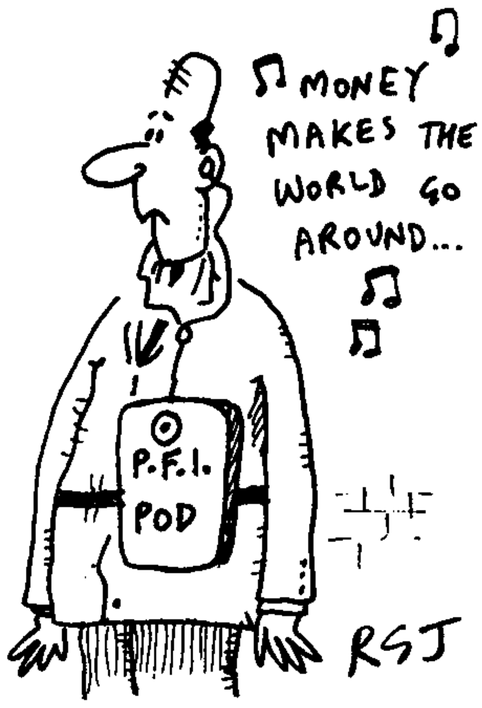
NHS trusts are already facing huge deficits – some of these caused by the annual PFI charges they have to make. Hiving off "profitable" areas, like elective surgery, will only destabilise the trusts further, and when they fail – hey presto – they will be ripe for takeover by the private sector. Other NHS units will shut and the service will become increasingly patchy and fragmented.

Many consultants, apparently seeing the writing on the wall, were reported by the *Guardian* last week to be signing up with venture capitalists to work in a new raft of multi-ailment treatment centres on the basis that they may as well cash in themselves rather than simply be employed by the private sector. But many more are adding their voice to the growing protest campaign launched last weekend at the National Health Service Consultants' Association*.

Prof Allyson Pollock, author of *NHS plc*, was accused of "scaremongering" when she voiced concerns about the government's seismic shift towards privatisation of health services. But even she underestimated the speed at which the government is turning the NHS into little more than a management service which will buy in health care from the private competitive market. If the government fails to head the warnings from her and a growing number of health economists who are alarmed at the speed and the scale of the change, it will be NHS RIP.

* www.keepournhspublic.com

AFTER the grandiose Paddington hospital PFI deal was pulled earlier this year as cost estimates spiralled, the government desperately needs its latest flagship contract to go through smoothly if the programme is to remain credible. But the omens from the PFI project to rebuild the Royal London and St Bartholomew hospitals are already worrying.



The project should have been signed off with builders Skanska and private equity firm Innisfree earlier this year, but the "business case" for doing so has only been submitted to the department of health for approval in the last fortnight, with "financial close" now unlikely to come before the end of the year as penalties of £450,000 steadily accrue for every month of delay.

The strategic health authority's own review of the project shows that, even at this late stage, some serious uncertainties remain. Getting the computers up and running within budget depends on the performance of the NHS-wide Connecting for Health programme that has already had some conspicuous failures, while the degree of risk transfer to the private sector and what the non-PFI alternative (the "public sector comparator") would cost still remain to be assessed by consultants at PwC.

Even the request for the DoH's approval comes with the ominous caveat that it should only go ahead if "the scheme remains affordable" and on condition that "the accounting treatment of the scheme is supported by the appropriate balance sheet opinions" – in other words, once again giving the PFI game away, that the liabilities are kept off the trust's books.

The scheme is expected to come in at around £1.9bn, already well up on initial estimates, and has run into strong local opposition. Strangely one of its most outspoken critics is none other than the chairman of the Barts and Royal London NHS Trust, Dr John Ashworth. *Construction News* magazine recently reported Dr Ashworth telling a Save Barts campaigner: "The treasury ought to call PFI back, but that would put it back on the balance sheet. If this was the private sector you'd be in jail. This is what got Enron into trouble – it's all off the balance sheet. It's cloud cuckoo land, Alice in Wonderland stuff."

Dr Ashworth insists that he supports redevelopment; it's just PFI he's not keen on.

Meanwhile chairwoman of Save Barts, Wendy Mead, gave a clue as to why the scheme is likely to be pushed through anyway: "London's health authorities are going to be restructured in a couple of years and those who passed the business case won't be here to take responsibility."

HEALTH secretary Patricia Hewitt told the Labour party conference that involving private firms in the health service was a good way to "get desperately needed capacity in the NHS". But *Private Eye* has learnt that the department of health is itself supplying the independent sector with some of its own top staff.

Dr Tom Mann, director of the national implementation team that arranged the multi-million pound deals under which the NHS buys operations from private companies and new diagnostic and treatment centres, has left the DoH to run **Capio UK**, one firm that is doing very nicely from the scheme.

Though the DoH is unfussed about Mann's appointment as chief executive of the UK subsidiary of the Swedish private health firm ("Capio did not win any contracts, or achieve preferred provider status, whilst Dr Mann was employed in the department's national implementation team", says a spokesman), the BMA *is* worried about possible conflicts of interest.

The contracts between the NHS and Capio may not actually have been signed when Mann was in charge, but he was certainly involved in the process that led to the firm's selection. He was one of the NHS officials who met a team from Capio in July 2003. And in May of that year, health minister John Hutton told parliament: "The national implementation team is part of the new commercial directorate of the department of health. Answering to the new commercial director, Ken Anderson, the team is headed by a clinician, Dr Tom Mann". Just one month before, the government had announced that Capio was among the firms invited to negotiate to run the new DTCs.

Mann left his full-time job at the DoH in February 2004. On 17 February the government announced ten of the NHS "treatment centres" would be taken from one bidder, Mercury Health, and given to... Capio. While Mann had presumably left the department a few days before that announcement, he actually went back to work for the DoH from April 2004 to July 2005, working as a contractor for his own firm, Direct Health First Ltd, a company specialising in public-private healthcare.

IT NEWS

NO SOONER has the management consultants' association cast doubt on the value of its members' outsourcing work (*Eye* 1141), than a survey reveals that the consultants' other lucrative business, information technology services, isn't that clever either.

IT Week magazine found that many IT consultants were failing to satisfy even half their clients. The worst performers were Cap Gemini and Accenture, which both managed to give only around a third of their clients what they wanted (a success rate borne out by David Craig's recent exposé of the consultants' various scams, *Rip Off!*

None of this is very cheering for taxpayers as the government continues to pour billions into the coffers of these very firms: Cap Gemini is running the Revenue and Customs' IT system on a £10bn contract while Accenture is trousering billions on similar projects for the health service.

OLD JOKES REVISITED

MAYBE Sir Malcolm Rifkind's leadership campaign would be in better shape if he came up with some new jokes.

His sniping at the Tory conference in Blackpool about Tony Blair being like "Bill Clinton without the sex" was coined by Ben Pimlott in November 1996, deployed in *National Review* in 2000 and then by Sir Malcolm in July 2003 and June 2005.

MORE trouble at t'top in Britain's biggest private sector union, Amicus.

At September's meeting of the national executive committee, general-secretary Derek Simpson alleged there had been a plot to destabilise his leadership. "Former friends are out to get me," he declared, citing a critical website (www.amicus.cc) run by Amicus member David Beaumont. The NEC agreed to allow Simpson to take the "necessary steps to investigate the source of defamatory allegations... and consideration of... suing and expelling David Beaumont".

Simpson's ire seems to concern documents posted on the website which reveal the association between a close buddy of Simpson's, Amicus assistant general-secretary Les Bayliss, and a middleman who raked off a 10 percent commission from an £80,000 donation from the union to a children's charity, Express Link-Up.

The middleman, Steve Sampson, introduced Express Link-Up's chief executive Pat Ryan to Les Bayliss in 2001. The charity, which provides computers for sick children, has TV presenter Carol Vorderman as its patron. Cherie Blair is also a supporter, having starred in a promotional video for the charity. According to Ms Ryan, Bayliss requested that the payment to Sampson did not "show" in the charity's accounts. Ryan objected, saying this would be illegal and against charity commission rules. The charity received two further donations of £80,000 from Amicus, although no other payment was made to Sampson.

Following a complaint from Ms Ryan the union held an internal investigation, and cleared Bayliss of wrongdoing, although Simpson wrote to tell Bayliss that he had made a "serious misjudgement".

At the end of August this year Sampson was jailed for two-and-a-half years over an unrelated landfill tax scam. He was convicted of conspiracy to steal and conspiracy to falsify accounts documents. After a meeting between Simpson and Bayliss on 11 June 2003, Simpson's notes record that Bayliss described Sampson "as trustworthy and honest, or 'straight' as Les put it". Oh dear.

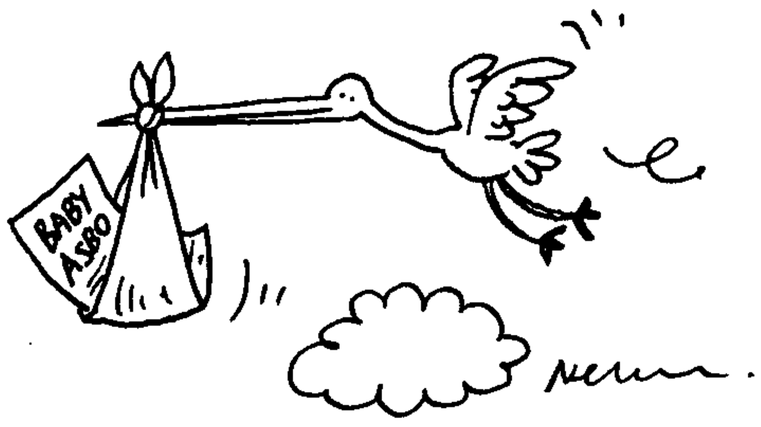
Being expelled by Amicus would be nothing new for whistleblower David Beaumont. In February 2002 he was expelled for having set up a website critical of former leader Roger "Currant Bun" Lyons (*Eye* 1049). Beaumont took his case to an employment tribunal and was reinstated after the union offered no evidence. Beaumont was awarded £5,600 compensation.

At the time Derek Simpson was full of praise for Beaumont's website, sending him a stream of congratulatory emails.

Typical was that of 16 February 2002: "David, thank you for your email. I am not sure what the reason is for Jackson [*Sir Ken Jackson, former joint general-secretary*] staying on, it would be nice to think it was because they thought I would win! I do know this however, that the more publicity we give to the antics of this bunch of bandits then the more chance I have of winning and thus turning the Union to a more sensible and democratic course. So if I can help you in any way you only have to ask. Regards. Derek."

How tragic to see former comrades fall out!

'Blackleg'



Down on the Farm

FEW public bodies are more reckless in how they dish out public money, it seems, than the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA).

In August, *Eye* 1139 revealed the curious tale of how, in the wake of the 2001 foot and mouth disaster, the SWRDA allowed Devon county council to hijack £50,000 it had awarded for a project designed to help local farmers by a Mr Kenneth Campbell. Mr Campbell never saw a penny of the money earmarked for his scheme, which somehow ended up in the council's pockets. But when Devon sought to deny its hijacking of the cash, the SWRDA supported the council's cover-up.

Now, more examples of the SWRDA's recklessness with other people's money have come to light. In 2002 another applicant for post-FMD funding was a Wiltshire "businessman", Les Fearn. His scheme, similarly designed to help local farmers market their produce, was submitted in the name of Regional Producers (Wiltshire) Ltd, to which the SWRDA dished out £60,000. A condition of the grant was that 25 farmers should chip in money of their own, and even though only 19 could be recruited, paying sums ranging from £600 to £2,500, the scheme was launched.

A year later, having helped the farmers to sell only tiny amounts of their produce, Mr Fearn's company was bankrupt. It emerged that £25,000 of the taxpayers' money had gone to a Bristol solicitor, for his services in setting up the company; and £8,500 to a journalist for PR. What happened to the rest remained a mystery. But the SWRDA showed no further interest.

Even more remarkable is the ongoing story of the huge 28 megawatt "biomass power station" proposed by Peninsula Power, a company formed by three "businessmen", for a former airfield site at Winkleigh in the Devon countryside. Everything about this scheme, costed at £43m, is bizarre. The site, served only by minor roads, is wholly unsuitable for a project which requires the constant transporting of truck-loads of wood and council waste to serve as fuel. It has no natural water supply necessary to provide cooling. The backers of the scheme claim it is based on proven American technology, yet the only US experiment with it was soon abandoned as unworkable.

Not surprisingly this cockeyed project aroused outrage from local residents, not least when they found the environmental impact assessment submitted by Peninsula Power's consultants was riddled with errors and bogus claims about how the plant would help save the planet by cutting down greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the department of trade and industry promised £11.5m of taxpayers' money if the scheme could be got off the ground, on which basis the SWRDA has already shelled out more than £600,000. This included £412,000 to buy the site and £40,000 paid to the consultants, for a report which English Nature, English Heritage and Devon county council all dismissed as "inadequate".

The local council, Torridge, still has to okay the scheme, which in theory would meet the council's entire "renewable energy" target (set by the government). Otherwise all that is lacking is the balance of that £43m, £21m of which, Peninsula Power claims, was promised by an "international bank". When the protestors contacted the bank, however, it turned out that no money had been promised. It seems the SWRDA may soon have another mega-fiasco on its hands, at a cost to taxpayers of more than £600,000.

'Muckspreader'

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

THOUGH he was at the centre of two major international scandals and nearly forced the resignation of the late Robin Cook as foreign secretary, Lt Col Tim Spicer, Britain's most notorious mercenary, now appears to be enjoying a cosy relationship with the government.

Spicer is best remembered for his role in the 1998 arms-to-Africa affair which shook the Blair administration after Spicer's company Sandline International breached a UN embargo and sold arms to Sierra Leone. Only the year before Spicer had been involved in a botched mercenary operation against separatists in Papua New Guinea, which unwittingly sparked a coup.

Far from being persona non grata, however, Spicer had so many meetings with foreign office officials last year he appears to be the FCO's new best friend.

The meetings started when government officials got wind of the plot to oust the leader of Equatorial Guinea in March last year. Some time before Old Etonian SAS officer Simon Mann had got himself and a bunch of mercenaries arrested in Zimbabwe en route to orchestrate the putsch, the FCO had invited Mann's old friend Spicer in for a chat to run their intelligence past him. Despite their shared history, Spicer denied any knowledge of what Mann was up to.

Intrigued by the FCO's relationship with Spicer, inquisitive Labour MP Andrew Mackinlay discovered that Spicer in fact met with FCO madarins no fewer than nine times last year. No details of the visits were forthcoming. But thanks to the freedom of information act, details have now emerged.

The meeting about the planned coup in Equatorial Guinea occurred on 4 February 2004 with the head of the Africa Department Equatorial, Mr Tim Hitchens, a full six weeks before the coup was due to take place. Then on 8 April 2004 Spicer met the British ambassador in Oman, Stuart Laing, and another official. Up for discussion was the work being done for the Omani government by maritime security firm Hudson Trident, an Anglo-American firm part-owned by Spicer's new private military company, Aegis.

The following six meetings were in Iraq between 17 June and 26 September 2004 when Spicer met Edward Chaplin, the British ambassador in Baghdad. These all involved discussions of Aegis's controversial $293m contract in Iraq to oversee the safety of contractors and provide escorts for senior American and Iraqi officials – the largest such deal in post-Saddam Iraq awarded to a non-US firm.

Despite criticism about vetting procedures by the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, Spicer's contract in Iraq was extended for a second year, worth an additional £80m. No doubt this will have been welcomed by the Blair government which has been demanding a more commercial pay-off for British firms after Britain's support for the US in the Iraq invasion.

DOCUMENTS released under the freedom of information act throw more light on the last months of Ken Saro-Wiwa, who campaigned against the environmental damage caused by the oil giant Shell in Nigeria.

They show that, just months before he was executed by Nigeria's military government, the British foreign office had tried to help Shell make a film to "counter... Saro-Wiwa propaganda" while Saro-Wiwa was under arrest on trumped up charges of incitement to murder.

The documents were among many uncovered by Andy Rowell, James Marriott and Lorne Stockman, authors of a book to be published in the tenth anniversary of Saro-Wiwa's death this November.

The planned film is revealed in a letter, dated 23 February 1995, from the foreign office's Africa desk in London to British high commission staff in Lagos and Abuja. It asks for help for "an independent film maker" who "has accepted a commission from Shell to make a film about their operation in Nigeria". Shell would not identify the film but told the *Eye* it would have been one of many it makes for internal events, promotions and conferences and would not have been made for broadcast.

TV

The Daily Politics – Conference Special (BBC2)

ANDREW NEILL's smile, even more dazzling after recent cosmetic dentistry, is now beaming across our screens six times a week, hosting all the BBC's Westminster shows.

Brillo's spin doctors are even putting it about that he's the subject of a poaching raid from ITV as replacement for the Jonathan Dimbleby Sunday interview programme. Perhaps he'd be wise to get out of his BBC shows because, if the special editions from the Tory party conference in Blackpool are any guide, **The Daily Politics** is in the grip of television's most ruinous modern obsessions: accessibility and interactivity.

Opening Thursday's programme, extended to take in Michael Howard's farewell, Brillo, as usual addressing viewers as "folks", was coming on like a market-stall trader who fears the bloke next door has got better stuff on offer. After listing what was coming up in the programme, he roared: "How could you miss it? Don't touch that dial!"

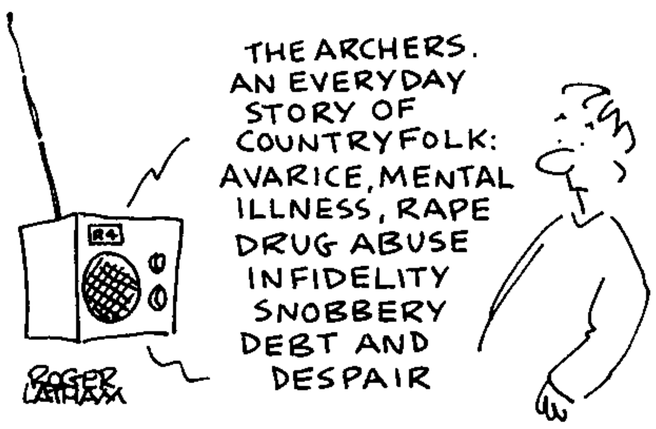
In the approved modern television fashion, most of the attempts to stop people turning the dial involved coming up with alternative, interactive uses for our fingers. "Join in our two-hour telethon!" Brillo urged. "We want to know your views!"

Earlier in the week, the programme had been soliciting an even more intense kind of feedback, inviting viewers to join "The Perception Panel", a focus group giving their instant reactions to the five leadership speeches as they were delivered. "Don't ever let it be said that this programme isn't interested in your views!" Brillo yelled, with the evangelical dementia towards which all the corporation's presenters are encouraged, post-Marr.

By Thursday morning, this format was approaching orgasm: "And the results of our Perception Panel, when we reveal, for the first time ever on network television, what you thought of all the speeches!"

But, while the audience bated its breath, it was back to the regular texts and emails. Keith in Leeds and Marjorie in Cirencester confided whether they thought Cameron or Davis would get it. Then Brillo of Paisley, kept in London by his multiple publishing interests, handed over to Sally Magnusson in Blackpool. Sally had breaking news: "Just remember – we love to get your emails!"

As the time for the leader's speech approached, there was a filler film in which Amanda Platell, former aide to William Hague, recalled what it was like when a leader was preparing for their speech. Because of the current assumption that viewers can only understand boring old politics through very obvious visual metaphors, Platell was standing beside a boxing ring.


THE ARCHERS. AN EVERYDAY STORY OF COUNTRYFOLK: AVARICE, MENTAL ILLNESS, RAPE DRUG ABUSE INFIDELITY SNOBBERY DEBT AND DESPAIR
ROGER LATHAM

Admittedly, her contribution did seem to include a revelation which would alarm the Christian right of the Tory party enough to cause a split. Platell recalled "that moment just before a speech, when you walk into the room and see the leader sitting their quietly, jacking off". But before Brillo and studio guests Alastair Campbell and Lord Tim Bell could discuss this suggestion that the Tory party has recently been led by wankers, closer examination of the tape showed that Platell had said, in her thick Antipodean accent, "jacket off."

By now Brillo, jacket on but sounding so aroused that he might have been jacking off, was ready to introduce Howard's speech and then, for the first time on network television, the results of the Perception Panel and, of course, more of your emails and texts. "Sorry if you're having trouble getting through," Brillo bellowed, "but shows how popular this is!"

But how popular is it really? At the end of the week Brillo was dementedly declaring that "even though we know how much you love the *Daily Politics Show*", he had still been amazed to learn that "three quarters of a million people" had tuned in on Tuesday afternoon to watch Ken Clarke's conference speech.

Yet, oddly, overnight BARB figures for that edition show 400,000 watching at the time of Clarke's address, which is double the *Daily Politics Show*'s usual audience but just over half what Brillo claimed: an unfortunate exaggeration for someone who likes to hold politicians to account on their economic claims. Indeed, the official figures show that the audience only reached 700,000 at the very end of the slot, when the rise is most likely to be accounted for by people switching on early to see the subsequent *Ready Steady Cook*.

Like a lot of people in television, Brillo and gang are confusing intensity of response with success. If you ran a weekly phone-in show about Garden Gnomes, the switchboards would be jammed because the few people interested in the subject would finally have something to do. They would probably fight to join a Perception Panel on which gnomes they preferred. But that wouldn't mean you had a hit on your hands. Strangely, given its claims to get to the truth under Westminster rhetoric, *The Daily Politics* is now all presentation and no substance.

'Remote Controller'

MEDIA NEWS

BBC director-general Mark Thompson has emailed staff to rebut claims in the New Statesman that the corporation is "muzzling" its journalists.

"There has not been a single example of me, Mark Byford or any other senior editors… trying to censor or soften anything."

Not recently, perhaps, but it this the same Mark Byford who issued a grovelling apology to the government post-Hutton and who announced on Radio 4's *Feedback* programme that "the notion of exclusives here, exclusives there, exclusives everywhere is not appropriate for the BBC"?

WILL the BBC's much-heralded move to Manchester actually go ahead?

D-G Mark Thompson still has to put the case for the move to the board of governors and he was careful to emphasise in a Q&A session with BBC staff that he'll only put the case "provided we are satisfied it meets the value for money criteria. It does to an extent depend on the future funding". Nevertheless he adds that he remains "totally committed to it".

It's a clear admission that redundancies will be needed to pay for the move – a connection unlikely to impress governors who want to see "new" money invested in the digital switchover. It's also an admission that the move is dependent on "future funding" – including funding from an increase in the licence fee, approved by a government also keen for the BBC to invest funds in the digital switchover.

DUMB BRITAIN

National Lottery: It To Win It, BBC1

Dale Winton: What type of weapon was a claymore? Was it (a) mace, (b) sword, or (c) dagger?

Contestant: Well I know it can't be mace, as the police have only just started using that.

Winton: On a ship, what is a blue peter? Is it (a) crow's nest, (b) flag, or (c) anchor?

Contestant: Well, I remember from watching Blue Peter, that they used to give out badges shaped like an anchor.

Winton: Which bird lays its eggs in other birds' nests? Is it (a) jackdaw, (b) cuckoo, or (c) magpie?

Contestant: Well, it's not a cuckoo because that lives in a clock.

Sara Cox show, Radio 1

Sara Cox: Complete this well-known saying: 'Beauty is in the eye of the...'

Contestant: Tiger.

• *On sale now – "Mediaballs 2". Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* •

THE *Times*, forever keeping a watchful eye on the BBC's news presenters, devoted more than 1,500 words to the departure of Philip Hayton, who quit the corporation last month pleading "incompatibility" with his News 24 co-host Kate Silverton.

The pair's "personality clash" was detailed over 800 words in the home news section, not to mention an edition of the *Grauniad*-pilfered Pass Notes devoted to the row. Columnist Jonathan Gornall also weighed in with the opinion that "sexism in the media is bad for all of us".

Curiously, this was more than 1,500 more words than the paper managed to devote to a similar incident in 2001, when newsreader Frank Partridge was sacked after physically attacking his co-presenter Kay Burley after they fell out over who was to deliver the "and finally" piece at the end of a programme. No doubt the Murdoch-owned paper thought its paltry audience share meant readers would not be interested in goings-on at an obscure channel called Sky News.

POLICE in north Wales are investigating a complaint that an ITV film crew deliberately dropped litter on a council estate in Bangor while filming a report on... keeping Wales tidy.

Residents of the Maesgeirchen estate claim that before reporter Ian Lang and crew shot their piece on 15 September, they gathered rubbish from around the area and piled it in a bus stop. After filming in front of the litter, the crew left without putting it in the bin a few feet away.

Mr Lang denied he or his crew piled up litter to make it seem worse than it was, and said the only reason he picked any up during the shoot was to put it in the bin.

He also said the piece was not intended to target Maesgeirchen but to highlight how easy it was to find rubbish anywhere in north Wales.

In fact Maesgeirchen, one of the poorest areas in Wales, has recently undergone a massive community-led regeneration, involving more than 50 children from the estate clearing rubbish from the area. The project has been so successful the Environment Agency is using it "as a model for other such socially deprived areas in Wales".

LONDON radio station LBC provides, as its jingles inform listeners, "non-stop news for London". So when a policeman was stabbed during a routine patrol almost directly outside the LBC studios in Bramley Road, W11, last Wednesday, how did the station deal with the news?

Almost two hours after the injured officer had been taken to hospital, LBC's rolling news service managed to get hold of the inspector in charge of the investigation and request that he "give us an idea of exactly where this happened, for listeners who don't know the area".

Meanwhile there was no trace of the incident on the news section of the station's website, which instead was splashing with the revelation that "You SHOULD be getting more songs to download onto your iPod, according to a London Euro MP.".

IN THE early hours of Sunday 2 October BBC Radio 5 Live presenter Dalya Raphael went live to northern Italy correspondent Mark Duff for the latest on a planned strike by ballet dancers at La Scala.

"The planned strike by the corps de ballet involves a production of *Manon* by Massenet... but don't ask me what it's about, as I know nothing about ballet," said Duff.

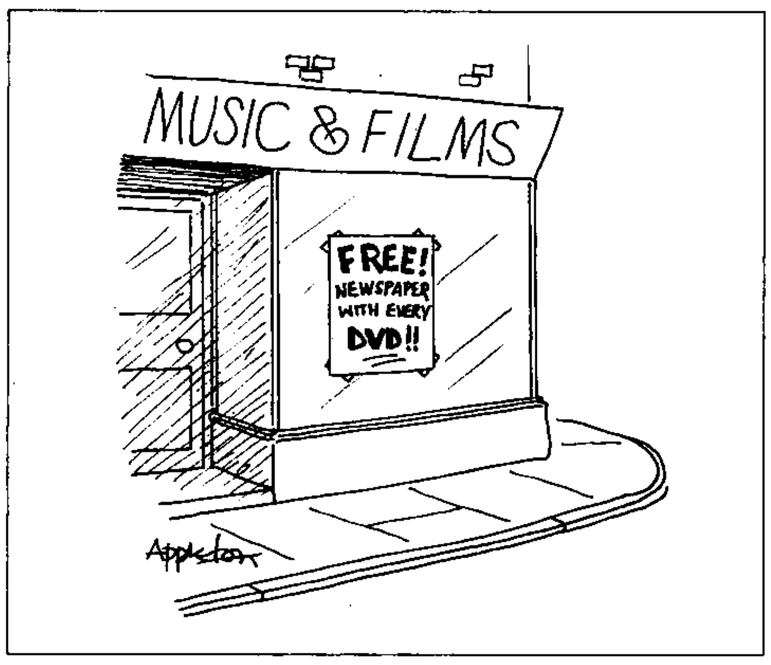
Fortunately Dalya was able to put him right. "Don't worry," she told him with cheerful condescension. "We'll let you off that one... But actually it's called *Manon des Sources*."

Er, actually it's not. *Manon des Sources* – the book by Marcel Pagnol turned into a film by Claude Berri (as a sequel to *Jean de Florette*) has bugger all to do with *Manon*, the ballet by Kenneth MacMillan (set to music by Jules Massenet, who also wrote an opera of that name).

I - S K Y

"Now Try Skydoku. Sky TV launches an interactive version of numbers game Sudoku for digital viewers tomorrow. The pay-per-play Puzzler Sudoku grid is accessed and filled in via the remote control... Sky said: 'Sudoku has taken Britain by storm. Millions more will now be able to test their logic'."

– *"News" story in the* Sun *(prop: R. Murdoch)*



PLUGGED IN

WHEN the *Times* gave away a free DVD last Saturday, readers had no excuse for missing it.

On the previous Tuesday Donald Hutera had devoted 400 words to the choreography of Bob Fosse, whose "best work was *Cabaret*, of which a free DVD comes with *The Times* on Saturday". And on Wednesday film critic Ian Johns spent another 400 words pointing out how "*Cabaret* – free with *The Times* on Saturday – is an artistic as well as musical masterpiece". He returned to his theme the following day with a further 1,000 words to "sum up the eternal appeal of *Cabaret*" which just happened to be "free with *The Times* this Saturday", while his colleague Roger Boyes popped over to Berlin to find out "what Germans think of the *Cabaret* world".

Finding his 500 words insufficient to fully explore this vital issue, Boyes devoted a further 700 in Friday's news section to how "Sally Bowles would have been proud" of the city's contemporary nightclubs, while Michael Freedland explored how the role "was the making of Liza Minnelli" in a double-page spread. This was in addition to the adverts which appeared daily in both sections of the paper pointing out that – entirely coincidentally – a copy of *Cabaret* was being given away with the paper at the weekend. Wilkommen, Bienvenue... Welcome!

YOUNG GAY MAN, £18,500 in debt from drama school: desperate to get straight. Please help.

Private Eye Smalls

RICHARD DESMOND is apoplectic with rage over the latest hitch in his plans to take over America.

His newly launched US edition of *OK!* went up against big hitters like *People* magazine to bid for the rights to Demi Moore's wedding to toyboy actor Ashton Kutcher – a union made juicier in celebrity terms because he is 15 years younger than his blushing bride.

A $3m deal was thrashed out by *OK!* with Moore's hard-nosed Hollywood representatives; and Desmond was looking forward to reams of glossy shots of the happy couple to promote his new magazine and beat his American rivals into submission. Alas, something was lost in translation between the UK and US offices of the mag. Instead of acres of vulgar colour shots of everything from the exchange of vows to the table settings, the couple offered a handful of incredibly tasteful, *Vanity Fair*-style photographs for publication. To make matters worse for the colour-obsessed Desmond, they were in black and white – useless for catching punters' eyes on the newsstand.

Trembling staff on both sides of the Atlantic are desperately trying to pass the buck.

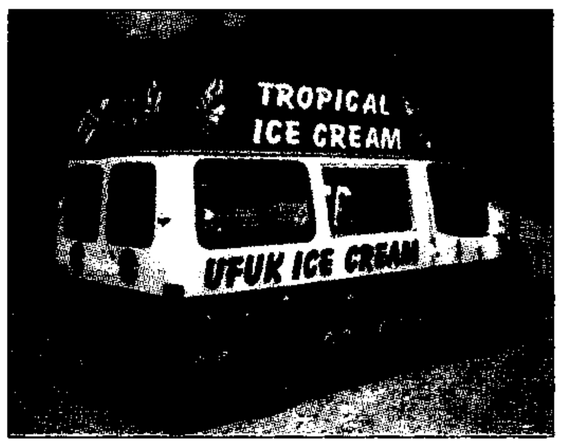
BOXING NEWS

WHEN the gentleman's sport of boxing needs defending, there is no noisier advocate than promoter Frank Warren.

Last July, for example, he launched an attack on one of his clients, Danny Williams, for allegedly letting the sport down. Williams had pulled out on the morning of his fight for the British heavyweight title against champion Matt Skelton.

"It was unprofessional and he should retire," raged Warren. "I don't want to be responsible for him getting back in the ring." He told a BBC Sport journalist that he would never put Williams on another of his cards. "If his head's messed up he shouldn't be fighting. He's done well, he's made money and he should move on," continued the sage.

Luckily for boxing fans Williams has chosen not to heed this advice and returns to the ring in December where he will finally face Skelton. And the promoter of this "unprofessional" man's fight? Step forward... Frank Warren.



I-SPY

Salamis, N. Cyprus.

Submitted by Peter Keymer.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER

FRENCH CONNECTION DITCH THEIR 'FCUK' CAMPAIGN:
THIS NEW CAMPAIGN'S FAR MORE REPRESENTATIVE OF OUR CLOTHES.....
French Connection
LOVE IT !!!
BOLOLCKS

DOING THE ROUNDS

DO WE still need heart surgeons? Most people would rather avoid having their chest split open; and with the increasing use of new stents (tube-shaped devices that are fitted inside restricted coronary arteries to keep them unblocked), UK cardiac surgeons have stopped issuing training numbers because there isn't enough work to go around.

The demise of heart surgery has been predicted ever since angioplasty (dilating blockages with a balloon) arrived in the 1970s. Alas, 30 percent of dilated coronary arteries closed up again soon afterwards and the surgeons stayed in business. The first bare metal stent was inserted in 1986; but once again, a quarter of these blocked at six months.

"Drug-eluting" stents – stents that are covered with drugs that prevent the artery narrowing again – were developed in the 1990s. The results so far appear impressive, with reblockage rates down in single figures and cardiologists claiming that 90 percent of coronary heart disease can now be treated by them, rather than surgeons. Indeed, one cardiologist in the south west claims to refer just one out of 200 diagnostic angiography cases to surgery. The rest get angioplasty and stents.

Interventional cardiologists (ICs) are also hoping to corner the market in heart attacks, with some research showing that angioplasty shortly afterwards is far more likely to prevent reblockage than the clot busting drugs currently used. The message – "if your heart hurts, get to a catheter lab" – will mean a vastly increased, round the clock workload for cardiologists. At present, you only get the gold standard treatment if you have your heart attack in office hours near a specialist centre.

ICs are also taking on the macho, difficult cases (eg blockages in the left mainstem coronary artery) previously left to the surgeons. They collect and publish their results on the British Cardiovascular Intervention Society website. Alas, the audit is far from independent (ICs collect their own figures, and enter their own indications, complications and results) but those who do not submit data are at least named and shamed publicly.

ICs also have an unhealthy reliance on the stent industry. Most of the research, training and educational meetings are paid for by manufacturers such as Cordis and Boston Scientific and the "stent wars" competition is fierce with a multi-billion dollar global market. In such an environment, it's easy to see how bias can creep into research and practice.

So how is the NHS coping with the cost of stenting? Fifty-two percent of stents are currently drug eluting and the waiting time to see a cardiologist compares well with the rest of Europe. But there have been some almighty cock-ups. Half of England's 68 catheter labs do diagnosis (angiography) only and have to refer to another centre for treatment (angioplasty). In the new regime of Payment By Results (PBR), they'll become redundant because no one will pay for the same procedure twice.

Also under PBR, short stay emergency procedures attract only 40 percent of the tariff of longer stays, regardless of what it costs the hospital. So brilliant same-day treatment with the best stents gets a fraction of the reimbursement of a cheap bodge-up job over several days. Unless the DoH corrects such anomalies, gaming and mediocrity will continue to thrive in the NHS.

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

WE'VE DONE THE TESTS. YOUR FATHER HAS ALZHEIMER'S. THE PAST IS MORE REAL TO HIM THAN THE PRESENT...
I'M A GOOD BOY!
I ENVY HIM...
OH OH!
WISH I COULD REMEMBER WHEN THIS WAS A DECENT HOSPITAL
MATRON GAVE ME A LOLLY...

SIGNAL FAILURES

New Labour's Brum deal

"NEW" Labour has belatedly developed a transport strategy. It goes like this:

1. Force more people to use cars by cutting train services and raising fares. 2. Clobber them with a congestion charge that's higher the more overcrowded the road. 3. Er… 4. That's it.

The West Midlands could be the guinea pig. Its growth in rail passengers has far outstripped the UK average. Had it not been saddled with pisspoor Central Trains since 1997, the increase would have been even greater. Rail now accounts for more than 20 percent of journeys to work in Birmingham city centre, where more people now commute by public transport than by car.

Birmingham's busiest local railway is the cross-city line, from Lichfield to Redditch via the centre. It won a grant for six trains per hour instead of four in 2002, when "new" Labour still thought public transport was a good idea. The grant would last to the end of National Express's Central Trains franchise in April 2006, two years after the original expiry late.

The transport department still hasn't addressed the Central situation. Its priority is reprivatising Kent's trains, to stop state-owned South Eastern Trains embarrassingly showing the benefits of nationalisation (*Eyes passim*), so now the Central franchise will drag on for two more years. The transport department is seizing the opportunity to dump on Centro, the region's transport executive. Rather than extend the cross-city grant to the new expiry date, the department has demanded a quote for retaining six trains per hour instead of reverting to four in April. Central Trains will design the quote to bolster National Express' rail profits (up 76 percent last year), and Whitehall will tell Centro to cough up or lose a third of its flagship train service.

London bureaucrats previously used two other excuses for rail cuts in the West Midlands: lack of capacity on the west-coast mainline and low passenger numbers. Neither applies to cross-city. Just two months ago the "strategic" rail authority published a regional capacity study which doesn't mention constraints on the cross-city line. But it was unimpressed with the region's lack of "crowding" (ie overcrowding) and noted: "A substantial proportion of the rolling stock provided in the West Midlands is only really needed for a few short-distance weekday journeys."

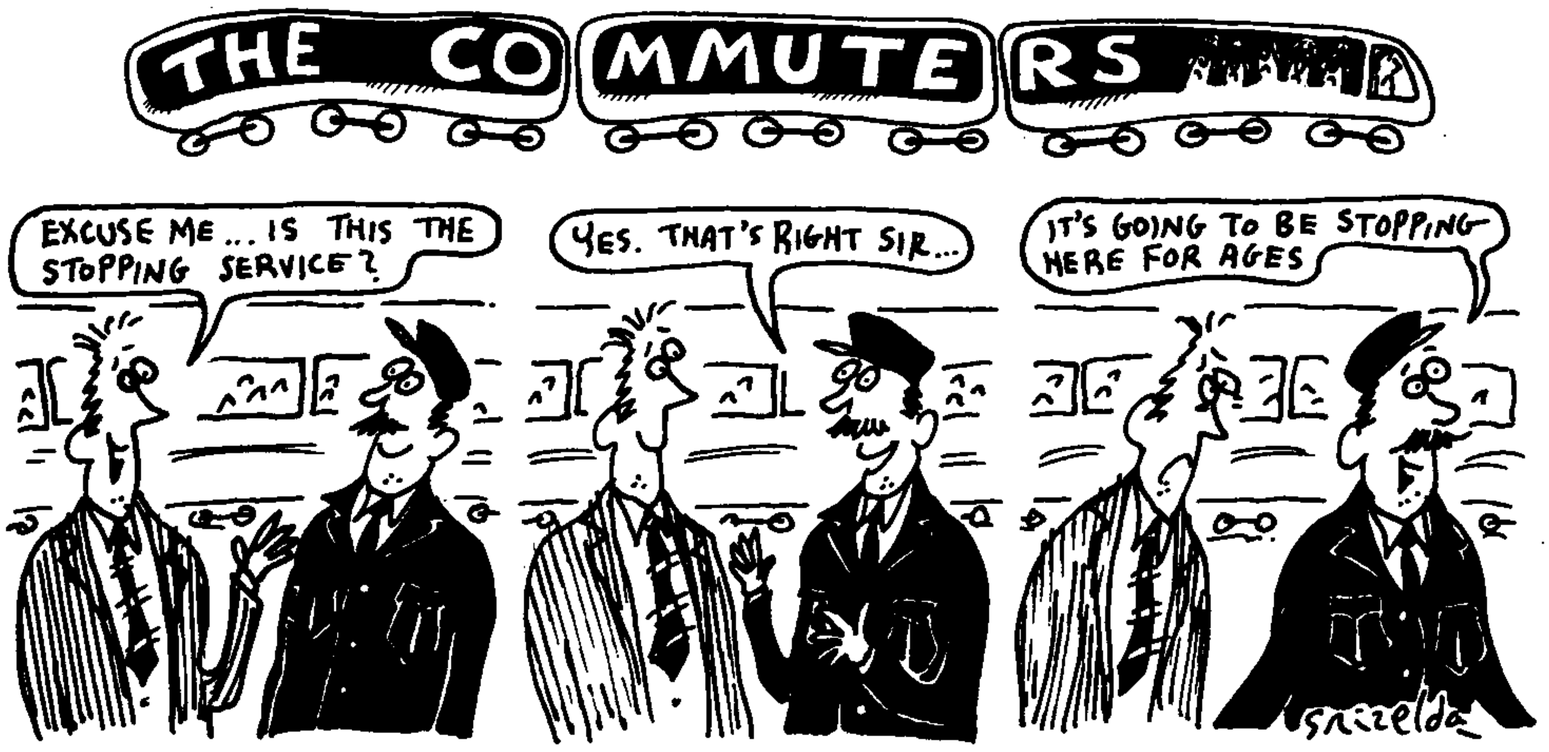
So what? All motorised commuter transport is inefficient, including that used by Whitehall civil servants. Across Britain cars worth millions of pounds do nothing from nine to five, parked on land worth even more. "New" Labour's expensive commuter trains on the Chunnel rail link from Kent (*Eye* 1124) won't be full even in rush hour. At least in the West Midlands the trend of rapidly growing passenger numbers and the pull of the new Bullring shopping centre will fill more train seats.

Slashing cross-city services would cause overcrowding on remaining trains, limited to six carriages by station lengths. That and the loss of "turn up and go" convenience would push travellers on to the roads. Although the region loses £2.5bn a year through road congestion, officials in London evidently think it needs more road traffic. They are also eyeing the West Midlands as the probable pilot region for nationwide road charging, where fees will mirror each road's congestion.

Logically work would start now to increase public transport capacity so road congestion is relieved by a mass switch from cars when the charge begins. Instead "new" Labour is raining blows on West Midlands rail: Central Trains is still inflicted on the region, Northampton-Birmingham local services have been halved, small stations are being closed, a temporary cut in Birmingham-Shrewsbury trains because of staff shortage will become permanent, Wolverhampton-Walsall trains will be axed and even cross-city faces cuts. All this implies government strategy is to stop motorists escaping to trains; fewer car journeys would mean fewer drivers paying the congestion charge *and* lower charges per vehicle, not to mention fewer tax receipts from fuel.

PS: Rail subsidy in the West Midlands was 62p per passenger in 2003-04, according to the Rail Industry Monitor 2005. That's lower than in any of the six other city regions covered by transport executives. If the world's fourth richest economy can't afford 62p per passenger, what will "new" Labour make of South Yorkshire and Greater Manchester, where subsidy is over £4 per passenger, when it completes its hatchet plan for Northern Rail (postponed because of the "political issues around it" before the general election – *Eye* 1128)? And why is the government still refusing to refranchise Richard Branson's Virgin West Coast farce, where subsidy per passenger in 2003-04 wasn't 62p but £22.28?

'Dr B Ching'



ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TONY'S TOY POLICEMEN

IN PURSUIT of "new" Labour's crackdown on yobs, Tony Blair's favourite elected mayor, Sir Robin Wales, boss of Newham council in east London, had a brilliant idea last year. He and his sidekick Cllr Ian "antisocial" Corbett, set up their own 38-strong borough-wide "police" force – manned by Newham's former parks wardens.

They wear second-hand police uniforms, indistinguishable from the real thing, have a blue flashing light on their van and stop, search and question suspects. Some – illegally – carry handcuffs and batons. In another authentic touch, black and Asian "constables" have accused their white colleagues and managers of racism.

But wearing a police uniform does not turn a park attendant whose duties have not previously extended much beyond picking up litter into a police officer – especially as there is virtually no training.

The "constables" and "sergeants" (who report to an "inspector") fall into two groups: the original park attendants, who are scared witless at being called to attend incidents across the borough, where they risk abuse and assault; and a gung-ho group of newer recruits who fancy themselves swaggering around in uniform sorting out yobs.

Few, if any, are of the calibre required of a genuine police officer. Legally they have no more power to arrest or question a suspect than any other member of the public, but the man or woman in the street is not to know that. So far the whole pantomime has cost £1.4m – enough to put 30 real police on the streets.

When serious concerns about the "force" surfaced earlier this year, Newham's chief executive "Dave" Burbage reluctantly commissioned a report from the borough's former head of legal, Amanda Kelly. Her damning report is now being considered by Newham's cabinet. "The constabulary has begun to function more like a private police force than a council service," concludes Kelly. There is "an almost total absence of management systems and procedures... the council and its officers are vulnerable to allegations of corruption because of perceptions that contractors are used because they are known to the managers... recruitment practice is poor... lack of basic management systems... communication with staff is poor, sometimes non-existent... staff morale is low..." Only a complete overhaul of the management would turn things around, says Kelly, although she doesn't recommend scrapping the scheme.

Meanwhile many Asian women in the borough are so terrified of youths who shout racist slogans and throw dog excrement at them that they are afraid to go into Newham's parks – where there are hardly ever any wardens on duty because they're all off somewhere else, playing at coppers.

● SO FAREWELL, then, Dame Jane Roberts, who has resigned as leader of Camden council to spend more time with her teenage son. She departs after engineering the sacking of one of her own most well-respected Labour councillors, Brian Woodrow. He was ousted as chair of development control following a complaint made against him by Camden's borough solicitor Alison Lowton to the Standards Board for England (*Eye* 1135). The SBE produced a confidential "interim report" which found Cllr Woodrow to be biased against a £2bn development at King's Cross which council officers have been promoting. Woodrow's lawyers warned the SBE that the report was not only unfair but unlawful, as Cllr Woodrow was denied sight of key documents and his own witnesses were not interviewed – unlike Ms Lowton's. They also pointed out that the SBE was acting with undue haste, as the amended King's Cross application was only submitted three weeks ago and will not come before any committee before next year. As soon as Lowton received the report she leaked it to Dame Jane, who promptly whipped the Labour group into ousting Woodrow from his post.
All in all, another triumph for the standards board in its mission to build "confidence in local democracy"!

BAA HUMBUG

THEY like fancy titles at Conservative-controlled Havering council on the east London-Essex border. A few years ago they changed the name of the planning committee to the "regulatory services committee", presumably because it sounded grander. If only the behaviour of the Essex boys who sit on the council lived up to the dignity of their titles.

On 15 September the committee considered an application from farmer Jenny Salter, who wanted to site a small mobile home on land near Rainham, where she keeps rare breeds of sheep, to enable someone to keep watch on her animals at night, following attacks by local yobs. Officers recommended approval.

When councillors came to discuss the application, the question arose of how capable sheep were of defending themselves if attacked. Cllr Denis O'Flynn observed that sheep could defend themselves by head-butting, but would be defenceless if turned on to their backs. This was the cue for councillors to shout "how do you know?" "what have you been doing?" and "we know what you've been up to!"

According to a letter from Independent councillor Jeff Tucker, who witnessed the scenes, to the council's monitoring officer: "Laughter broke out. It was clear that members were suggesting that Cllr O'Flynn had been having sex with sheep." Planning officers did not join in the banter, reminding the members that considering a planning application was a serious issue, but the laughter continued, now interspersed with loud "baa-ing". The applicant, Mrs Salter, was reduced to tears as the members turned down her application and went on to discuss other matters, "baa-ing" all the way to the end of the meeting.

The entire committee has now been reported to our old friends at the Standards Board for England.

● FOLLOWING in the footsteps of Doncaster's Labour mayor Martin Winter (*Eye* 1089), 50 councillors from Tory Oxfordshire are off to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art this month to improve their bullshitting skills. The county's ever-generous taxpayers are forking out a total of £13,000 on classes featuring "role-play and theatre-based activities in realistic council scenarios". The mind boggles, dahling.

DIRTY SECRETS

LAMBETH council doesn't seem to have quite entered into the spirit of this freedom of information malarkey.

Heather Brooke, author of a book on FoI, *Your Right to Know*, asked the council if it would release recent food safety inspection reports on the borough's restaurants. She assumed that as such inspections are conducted and collected at taxpayers' expense the public should to have a right to see the results, as they do in her native United States. Other London councils – Westminster, Camden, Southwark, Tower Hamlets, Islington and Kensington & Chelsea – had all been willing to release such documents.

Lambeth, after consulting m'learned friends (at taxpayers' expense, natch), told Brooke it would cost her an astonishing £4,284.30 to see the information she was after. Photocopying all the documents she required would be time-consuming and expensive, they said. No need, replied Brooke, I'll come in and look at them myself, so you don't have to slave over the photocopier. This time the council refused on the grounds that the names of restaurant inspectors are secret.

Brooke pointed out, to no avail, that the only people who might be tempted to intimidate or harass restaurant inspectors would be restaurant owners – and they know their names and direct line telephone numbers already, because they're on the inspection reports, which the restaurateurs get. At this point – last April – Brooke gave up and told the council to forget it.

Six months on the council has sent her a bill for the £4,284.30 of work it didn't do... accompanied by a threat to send in bailiffs if it is not paid in seven days!

EDUCASHUN NEWZ

THE first academy school in the London borough of Brent, Capital City Academy, cost £26m and saw GCSE results actually worsen: from a 29 percent A-C pass rate to just 16 percent, one of the worst in the country.

So it's no wonder teachers in the borough aren't too keen on the prospects of a second one. Nevertheless there's a multi-millionaire ready and willing to put up the cash in return for interfering in what kids are taught, so of course a new academy is on the cards. The megabucks in question come from Andrew Rosenfeld, executive chairman of property investment firm Minerva, who also chairs the NSPCC's Full Stop campaign. Mr Rosenfeld has said he wants the curriculum in "his" school "to put social welfare and community responsibility at the forefront".

It all sounds very laudable, and at least it won't turn the science curriculum on its head in favour of creationism; but it's worth noting that Mr Rosenfeld's business is currently trying to avoid responsibility for pensions for former staff of the collapsed Allders, which was owned by Minerva.

To make matters worse, it is planned to build the academy on a sports ground – the Wembley Park Sports Ground on Forty Avenue. What was that Tony Blair said about "more competitive sport in schools"? By the time there's a school on the site, there won't be much room for games.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

SO YOU BELIEVE YOU'VE BEEN THE VICTIM OF A PARTICULARLY VICIOUS CASE OF IDENTITY FRAUD, SIR?
ISLINGTON POLICE STATION
"BELIEVE"! "BELIEVE"! IT'S SCREAMINGLY OBVIOUS, OFFICER!
LOOK AT MY BANK STATEMENT: £800 WORTH OF SOVEREIGN RINGS AT 'WORLD OF BLING'. €1,000 ON A BEIGE LEATHER SUITE AND, ACCORDING TO THIS, I'VE RACKED UP A €1,200 BILL ON LAP DANCERS AT THE PEPPERMINT HIPPO EXECUTIVE GENTLEMAN'S CLUB!!!

Teaching	30
Speical Educational Needs	30
Community Learning	30

grauniad

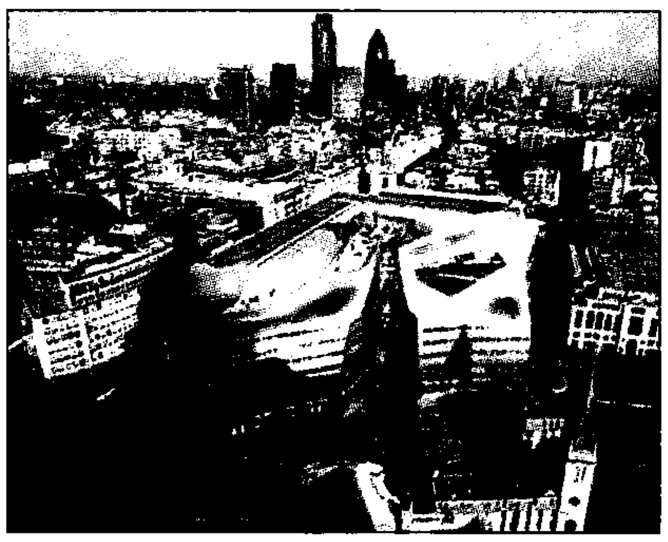
NOOKS and CORNERS

TO THE east of St Paul's Cathedral are the New Change Buildings, erected for the Bank of England in 1953-60 as part of the post-war rebuilding of the badly blitzed City of London. Designed by Victor Heal, this large block, running down Cheapside, is conservative in design. Indeed, back in 1962 Pevsner found it "almost beyond comprehension how a design that would have been reactionary 20 years before could have been put into execution in the 1950s".

But times have changed and not only can we now see that it has lasted much better than the sort of modern structure Pevsner would have preferred, but its architectural merits have become more evident. Yes, it is a rather stuffy Classical design; but it is dignified and certainly more competent than the Post-Modern Classical blocks that have gone up in the City in the last two decades.

Heal's building is properly urban. Shops run along Cheapside; there is a large internal courtyard and a sunken garden, while a dignified curved frontage follows the line of New Change and is deferential to St Paul's across the road. The building is faced in conspicuously high quality stone and red brick, and enhanced with well-cut stone details and architectural sculpture. It could perfectly well be refurbished internally and, if too small, could discreetly be raised in height. Unfortunately the building is not listed. Partly because of the prejudice against this sort of unexciting architecture and partly because it seemed inconceivable that the august Bank of England would abandon it, the New Change Buildings were not recommended for protection in English Heritage's survey of post-war buildings. And now the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport has obliged the site's developer-owner, Land Securities, with a gratuitous and nefarious certificate of immunity from listing.

So what will now replace Victor Heal's sober pile? Why, an exciting masterpiece by an internationally famous superstar, the French architect Jean Nouvel! Pandering to our celebrity-obsessed culture was obviously a good way to secure planning permission. And now this pouting, shaven-headed, black-shirted genius – the Johnny Hallyday of French architecture – has come up with an unusual design. It is an incoherent commercial lump, faced in "unusual matt glass" and costing £200m, enhanced by arbitrary faceting and cuts. M. Nouvel has helpfully explained that his design "is about enriching the City with a new sort of modernity, one that reaches beyond itself to speak, to contemplate and to reveal the diverse character of its surroundings. It is a contemporary building which will set up a dialogue with St Paul's Cathedral..." This it does by having a cut through the New Change façade which points at Wren's dome – so very subtle, so very sensitive.



The Hallyday design is pretentious, ugly and alien; but the real point is that the existing building ought not to go because it is civilized and well made and perfectly capable of a continuing valuable life – probably a much longer life than that of its proposed replacement. Not only that, but in terms of materials and construction it represents a huge amount of "embodied energy" (dread phrase!). As the Buildings Research Establishment has pointed out in the context of John Prescott's manic Pathfinder systematisation of the North of England, even a humble Victorian brick terrace house – of the sort Prezza wants to bulldoze by the tens of thousands – represents some 15,000 litres of petrol in terms of embodied energy (*Eye* 1126). Whether or not Victor Heal's reactionary masterpiece deserves listing, in an intelligent and responsible city it certainly ought not to be demolished.

IN EYE 1134 I discussed the disgraceful proposal by our Consulate in Istanbul to lease St Helena's Chapel, damaged by the al-Qa'eda bomb which killed the consul-general and others, to a neighbouring hotel. The chapel remains closed – by order of the consulate – but the campaign waged by the Anglican chaplain in Istanbul to bring it back into use has succeeded – through action in the local courts – in halting the commercial development of the chapel grounds. Fortunately, there are many who have more respect for the consulate's history and more sense of what behaviour our presence in a foreign country demands than the current consul-general: letters have appeared in the press and questions asked in parliament about what is going on. (Incidentally, while it would only take £20,000 to repair the chapel, the consulate is proposing to spend £60,000 on its ten-year-old club building.)

All this has infuriated not only the Bishop of Gibraltar, who would be done with the wretched building, but also the foreign secretary, who has been badgering the editor of the* Times *about the publicity given to the scandal. Now Jack Straw is keen that Turkey joins the European Union: fair enough, but does he really have to demonstrate what a modern, go-ahead, secular country Britain now is, perfectly able to cope with Islam, by abandoning a chaplaincy which has been on the site in Pera for almost four centuries?

'Piloti'

AD NAUSEAM

NOTHING rouses the advertising industry from its summer slumber like a good old messy pitch... and they don't come much bigger than British Airways' £60m account – one of the few advertising pitches that would ever make it in to the national press.

It's an especially enticing face-off because BA's account has been in the hands of the Saatchi brothers, in one guise or another, for more than 20 years. Even now, no one in adland wants to miss a chance to stick it up a Saatchi.

Of the four agencies involved – M&C Saatchi, BBH, JWT and DDB – all are claiming publicly that their final presentation went well. BBH, widely thought to be the favourite, left the room being told by BA's marketing chiefs that it was "great to witness the top of the advertising industry working at its best". Only JWT's outward confidence seems odd, as sources say that immediately after their pitch they left the room feeling certain they'd blown it. And then there were three...

GUINNESS is one of adland's most hallowed brands. It featured in the very first commercial break, and since then its reputation as a pioneering advertiser has grown and grown, thanks to an accrual of work involving toucans, Rutger Hauer, fish on bicycles and dancing Eskimos.

Each new Guinness advert, therefore, is unusual – people actually want to see it. But this in turn lumbers every new spot with the responsibility of living up to the legacy. Since 1999's Surfer, a self-consciously arty epic that was voted the best advert of all time, Guinness's agency AMV has been trying to repeat the trick with ever more self-consciously arty epics. As a result, the last offering, Antony Minghella's nauseatingly over-produced fable Mustang, is best remembered as a cautionary tale of what happens when adland disappears up its own epic backside.

So what of the new, £1m ad? It's called "noitulove", or "evolution" backwards, and that's exactly what we get: 60-seconds of CGI wizardry as three men in a pub are catapulted back in time to their evolutionary origins as bog-hoppers wallowing in primordial goo. "Good Things Come to Those Who Wait" runs the strap, the implication being that the entire human achievement has led us to three blokes in a pub.

For an ad about evolution it's ironic that the strapline is a retrograde step, another throwback to the heady days of the Surfer spot. Visually, "noitulove" moves so judderingly fast it takes several viewings to decipher, and even when you do, the impression is of another magnificent achievement for the post-production magicians papering over a void where there should be a new idea. In short, fans of quality advertising will just have to wait that little bit longer for another good thing to come.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Ken Livingstone wants it right in front of the National Gallery.
MANDELA STATUE ROW CONTINUES
"IT'S CRAP!"
"NO IT'S NOT!"
He should be locked up!
MANDELA STATUE

CULT CORNER

PROFOUNDLY negative vibrations are emanating from beneath the golden dome of the Maharishi European Sidhaland in Skelmdersdale, Lancashire, home to British followers of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi – aka "the Giggling Guru" or (to Beatles fans) "Sexy Sadie".

Back in January the UK leader of Sexy Sadie's transcendental meditation (TM) movement declared that "our principal objective this year is to make available personal enlightenment for every individual and invincibility for every nation". But now it turns out that one nation is to be excluded.

The Maharishi was so peeved by the re-election of Tony Blair's government in May that he has banned the teaching of TM here and ordered the movement to "withdraw" from the UK. "When we are filling our parental role in the family of nations by adopting a few countries and making them invincible," the 95-year-old guru explained, "we are also rejecting one nation – Britain – which has proven to be a poisonous, divisive influence in the world family."

While he had no qualms about carrying on his business in the US, Britain was beyond the pale – a "scorpion nation" which is "constantly busy destroying the world".

This leaves devoted TM teachers with only three choices: emigrate, find a new job or defy the Maharishi. It has also thoroughly messed up the Maharishi school in Skelmersdale, a private establishment which is high in the Lancashire league for exam successes. To be a pupil there you must first learn to meditate; but thanks to the guru's new edict, you can't learn in Britain any more. This has not been good for recruitment. Parents now have to ship their offspring around Europe to get the benefit of the Maharishi's "simple relaxation technique", shelling out hefty sums for travel and accommodation as well as the £1,200 fee for the most basic TM course.

Having damned the UK, the Maharishi is focusing on running "millionaires' courses" at $1m a time in his Dutch HQ at Vlodrop – though as a concession this has apparently been reduced to $500,000. This focus on the rich is also reflected in a speculative scheme dreamed up a couple of years ago by the British TM leaders – building Maharishi Sthapatya Veda homes on a brownfield site in Suffolk and flogging them off at £400,000-plus each.

The big lure is that all the houses will face east. According to the Maharishi, the ancient Stapathyveda texts inform us that a house facing east – to see the rising sun – is even more important than transcending and experiencing pure being and bliss. And, he might add, more lucrative.

Half the properties have already been pre-sold (allegedly), and the first four were completed at the end of August. This expensive development is being heavily promoted by the new leader of the UK TM movement, Dr Peter Warburton, who prefers to be known as "High Highness the Raja of England". But he may struggle to shift the unsold plots following the Maharishi's decision to boycott Britain.

Another worried man is Dr Geoffrey Clements, the former TM "governor-general of Europe" and leader of the Natural Law Party – famous for its deposit-losing election campaigns on behalf of "yogic flying" (jumping up and down on one's bum). He seems to have been slightly sidelined since the fast-track elevation of Raja Warburton, and now devotes himself to running the Maharishi Ayurvedic Products and Health Centres. With Sexy Sadie urging his followers to give Britain the bum's rush, some TM stalwarts wonder if these businesses will last beyond Christmas.

All is not lost, however. This summer Raja Warburton announced the purchase of the 30-acre Inishraher Island off the coast of County Mayo, which will have a Maharishi Peace Palace and serve as a "Maharishi Capital of the Global Country of World Peace". Ireland, you see, is not a scorpion nation. The Irish government may soon have a flood of applications for political asylum from the yogic flyers of Skelmersdale – and perhaps their schoolchildren too.

WORLD OF RETAIL

DESPERATE to stem its decline, Marks & Spencer has hired in a motivational expert from the US, Mary Gober, to lead evangelical-style rallies at the Birmingham National Exhibition Centre for all 56,000 M&S staff at an estimated cost of £10m.

It has been widely reported that staff have been dancing in the aisles. But the *Eye* is happy to report there was greater substance to Gober's rallies too. Staff have benefited from hearing her invaluable words of customer service wisdom which included "When a customer approaches, step out of the customer's way" and "Move items/trolleys when they block the customer's route."

If this searing insight wasn't enough, she added that "A Fresh Approach" is needed when greeting a customer. Try "Hello/Hi or Good Morning/Afternoon/Evening". And if a customer declines help, Gober instructs staff to say: "That's great! Please enjoy your shopping. My Name is... If you need help later, my colleagues and I are here to help. Just let us know."

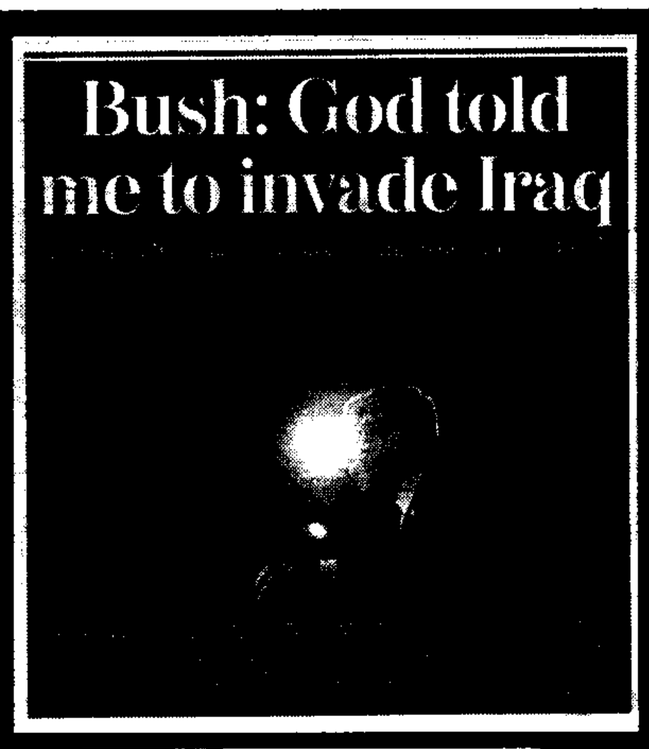
So if you are approached in M&S by a glassy-eyed and overly loquacious assistant, you'll know you've been Gobered.

"I'm not sure the everyday shopper really gives a damn about what Kate Moss does, but a company has to be seen to draw some lines."

– Ray Jones, spokesman for the UK's Chartered Institute of Marketing.

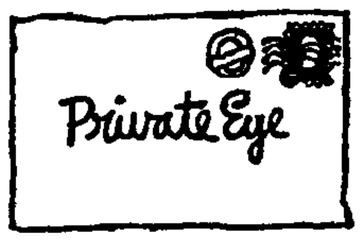
JUST FANCY THAT!

The Enfield Advertiser, 5 October 2005



The Independent, 7 October 2005

Letters



Plain talk

Sir,

In answer to your question about the purpose of the ODPM (Eye 1142), it is already carrying out one brilliant strategy to eradicate poverty.

The first phase is to solve the country's housing shortage by knocking down thousands of perfectly habitable and well-regarded terraced housing under the dubiously carpet-bombing inspired "Pathfinder" program. This of course adds more to the list of those needing housing instead of shortening it, however! Phase two is to house all these people in mass, cheap social housing on floodplains going east along the Thames.

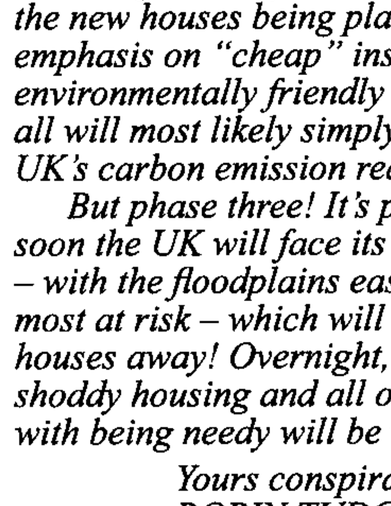
Thing is, many are complaining already that the new houses being planned have a design emphasis on "cheap" instead of being environmentally friendly or sustainable, so all in all will most likely simply weigh ever more on the UK's carbon emission reduction schemes.

But phase three! It's predicted that all-too-soon the UK will face its own Hurricane Katrina – with the floodplains east of the Thames Barrier most at risk – which will come and wash all these houses away! Overnight, the poor, their eco-evil shoddy housing and all other problems associated with being needy will be wiped out!

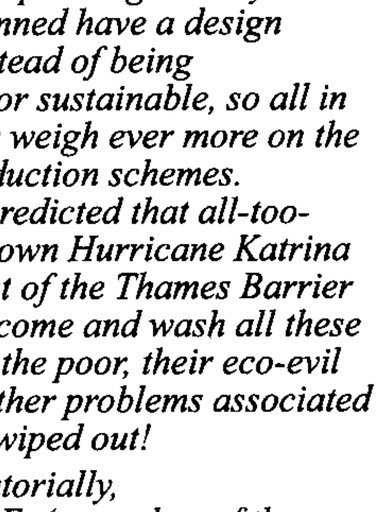
Yours conspiratorially,
ROBIN TUDGE, (co-author of the Rough Guide to Conspiracy Theories),

Via email.

Lookalike



Einstein



Lynam

Sir,

It is good to see that the new presenter of the 'Countdown' TV programme on Channel 4 is Albert Einstein. More than a match for Carol Vorderman I would think.

How fortunate he has a striking resemblance to the presenter Des Lynam. Are they by any chance related?

Yours sincerely,
NOEL TOMLINSON,

Hull, E. Yorks.

Doesn't add up

Sir,

Shock horror! In "Electric shock treatment" (In the Back, 1142) you note that GE Capital is damned by the Competition Commission for making profits "in excess of the cost of capital" – you cite this as evidence of "profiteering". Well, much as I hate to piss on your crusading chips, and I revile credit card companies with the best, but any fule no that if you run a business to earn less than your cost of capital, the result is Micawberish misery! All did classics, did you?

Big hugs regardless,
W.B. GIESBRECHT,

Chairman, Stockval.

Welcome to Britain

Sir,

I was very pleased to be informed by you that the Home Office is enthusiastically carrying out our wishes by deporting failed asylum seekers. But why didn't the Bosnian apply for asylum in one of the "numerous countries he passed through" en route? Perhaps their scale of freebies failed his requirements?

CHARLES SOLOMAN,

York.

Sir,

I find it amazing that a rag like yours prints twaddle about these so called "asylum seekers" like Mr Terzimustafic, so the poor lad has been wandering around Europe with post-traumatic stress and now he has decided to come to England where he can claim all the free benefits like the rest of them and live happily ever after at the tax payers' expense, you seem to mix up the term "asylum seeker" with "economic immigrant" why not tell it how it is? These people are only in England for one thing, you rightly tell your readers every fortnight how much these PFIs cost us, let us have the figures what these asylum seekers are costing, now that will be a real eye opener (geddit?) or are you restrained from printing inflammatory truths under the inciting racial hatred laws?

Yours faithfully,
MR R.G. BARNETT,

Switzerland.

"I'm from the lesbian squat next door, can I borrow a cup of semen?"

e-learning

Sir,

The E-University project was indeed a massive (and predictable) disaster (In The Back – Jobs for the girls, Eye 1141) but it was perhaps even worse than it seems. In this mode of education it is usual to count enrolments on modules rather than students, particularly because the module fee is the unit of income. A typical student may register for more than one module (as with the Open University). Was the figure of 900 in fact the total of module enrolments rather than student enrolments? If so the cost per student probably exceeded £100,000!

Even before the E-University was proposed, experts in the field knew that students were not rushing to learn this way, though it was convenient for some, and margins were very tight. So to throw £60m at the project was worse than foolhardy, and guaranteed a negative outcome that has damaged the image of e-learning to the detriment of those institutions, notably some new universities, that were and are developing effective and cost-conscious methods of distance learning online, often in partnership with commercial providers and overseas universities.

PROFESSOR CHRIS O'HAGAN,

Consultant in Educational Development for FHE, Southsea.

Conspiracy theory

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez follows the usual line "that everyone who agrees with me is tolerant and that everyone else is an extremist". Maybe the majority of the public either don't like Adam's music or his politics, or both.

It is ironic that a piece which initially addresses the death of Simon Wiesenthal degenerates into the very world-wide Jewish Conspiracy theory that he struggled to fight over so many decades. The idea that the empty seats in Edinburgh were the result of Jewish pressure would be pathetic were it not anti-semitic.

Incidentally, Jesus was born and died a Jew, irrelevant? But there again so is the fact that the librettist of Klinghoffer was apparently born Jewish and converted to Christianity.

TERRY NEMKO,

Via email.

Mighty wind

Sir,

Could it be that Robert Walkden (Letters, 1142) is worried about the effect of a wind farm on his local Derbyshire countryside. What he doesn't realise is that just because you don't like wind farms doesn't mean you have to support nuclear, which is more expensive than onshore or offshore wind, energy crops, wave power and micro hydro. (Not to mention us taxpayers bailing out the industry to the tune of at least £1bn through the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority.)

Nuclear energy isn't going to solve climate change. Construction, fuel, infrastructure, operation, waste treatment and decommissioning produce around 300,000 tonnes of CO_2 a year for a moderate-sized nuclear power station. And Mr Walkden might ask people on the Solway Coast or the Irish government how happy they are about pollution from nuclear facilities in the UK.

With steeply rising prices for oil and gas, we need quick and efficient sources of energy. Nuclear will not do this, but a mix of renewables and energy efficiency will. You don't have to be a green to be anti-nuclear, just well-informed.

Yours,
NICK MARSHALL,

Via email.

Planet Hedgehog

Sir,

I don't know what planet Hedgehog lives on, but it doesn't appear to be Earth from the anti-car diatribe on page 12 in 1142.

He claims that bus and rail passengers suffer as a result of motorists not paying more for fuel. Well, given that motorists provide the government with £43bn in revenue each year (that's one sixth of the government's total income) and that the government subsidises the greedy private bus and rail companies, suggests to me that motorists are already subsidising bus and rail passengers as it is. It also gives these private companies three times more subsidy than it ever gave publicly-owned British Rail.

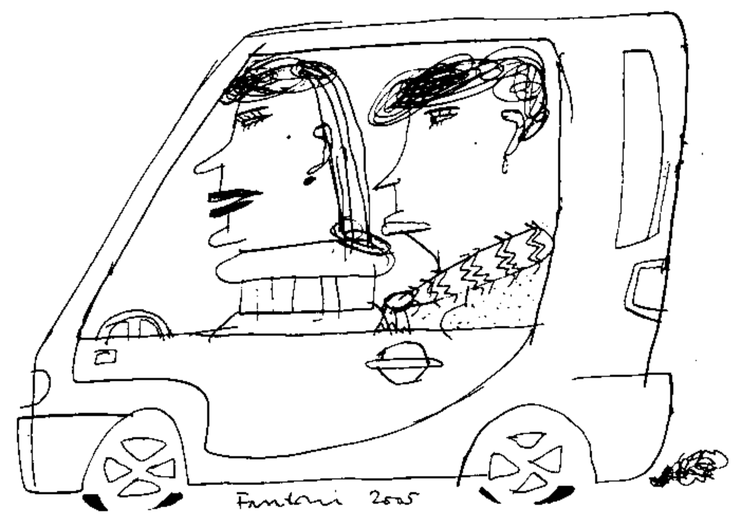
Truckers might well have something to say about Hedgehog's assertion that they are winners in the fuel duty stakes! Given that most goods come by road, this just keeps prices artificially high. Does Hedgehog support high prices?

Besides, after 12 years of speed cameras, the figures for road deaths have hardly changed, proving that the cameras are a failure, as far as road safety is concerned. The figures have remained around the 3,300-3,500 mark for the last 15 years. The government says that each and every one of the 6,000 greed cameras "saves lives". If this is true, why is anybody dying at all? But Hedgehog's friends at the treasury have netted £700m in revenue from these cameras over the last 12 years, so that should keep him happy.

CHRIS BURMAJSTER,

Marlow Bottom.

Scenes You Seldom See



"A 4x4 was never meant for driving in town, so we sold it and bought this"

Footballs

Sir,

Having heard the so-called sports correspondent on this morning's Today programme dismiss last night's Liverpool-Chelsea match as "a goalless bore", I then received the latest Eye and found you too sounding off against nil-nil football matches ("We were boring first" claims Neasden boss – Eye 1142). It may surprise you to learn that such scores are usually brought about by well-organised defences on both sides and are often just as exciting as draws earned by skilful captaincy in first-class cricket, as in the third test this summer.

*You remind me of the ignorant American TV people who tried to get the goals enlarged when the world cup was played there on the assumption that the more goals were scored the more popular it would be. Now, I know you don't LIKE football (the Premiersh*ts is usually spot-on), but you should at least try to understand it.*

Yours against dumbing down,
ALLAN WILCOX,

Via email.

Lookalike

Hardy

Clarke

Sir,

Obviously, I can't be the only one... but surely these two are related?

Yours sincerely,
NICK MARTIN,

Via email.

LUVVIES

"I felt a great pressure playing Che [Guevara] – from myself, from humanity."

GAEL GARCIA BERNAL
The Times bfi London Film Festival Supplement

Submitted by Strobes.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

● *On sale now – 'Scenes You Seldom See' by Barry Fantoni. Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

Wrong diagnosis

Sir,

Epilepsy is a clinical diagnosis, and is usually not diagnosed with any conviction by tests such as an EEG or brain scanning. These supplement a clinical diagnosis, but can't replace good clinical skills. Heart tests such as a 24hr ECG are almost useless in discriminating syncope (a transient loss of consciousness due to lack of bloodflow to the brain), from epilepsy. Plenty of other authorities support the notion of an important rate of misdiagnosis of epilepsy in the UK and elsewhere. These include Professor David Chadwick (currently President of the Association of British Neurologists, Smith D et al QJM. 1999;92:15-23), who found that 26 percent of patients in his own neurology outreach clinic in North Wales had been misdiagnosed with epilepsy. He advises scepticism about a diagnosis of epilepsy when there has been no previous brain injury. Others have found up to 40 percent of children to be misdiagnosed.

It is not understood by many healthcare professionals that convulsive syncope can cause twitching, jerking and incontinence, and appear to an observer to be just like epilepsy. Syncope is far more common than epilepsy, affecting about 50 percent of us in life, against about 1 percent with a diagnosis of epilepsy. A diagnosis of epilepsy can lead to a life-sentence of suffering and missed opportunity, and is a tragedy when the diagnosis is correct, let alone when it is wrong. The solution to the widespread problem of misdiagnosis is better education and re-education, a heightened level of awareness, willingness to suspend judgement, and collegiate and collaborative working between specialties. This avoids patients being trapped in the wrong care pathway.

DR ADAM P FITZPATRICK
MD FRCP FACC,

Consultant Cardiologist, Manor Lodge Consulting Centre, Cheadle, Cheshire

Badge of honour

Sir,

Your ex-service readers will be gratified by the announcement from the minister of veterans (who he?) that those who survived German, Japanese and their allies' efforts to kill them can apply for a Veterans Lapel Badge for free. Those similarly pursued by Palestinians, Egyptians, Koreans, Indonesians, Afghanis, Iraqis, Malayans, Irish, Adenis and others, alas, are not eligible. Perhaps a dried octopus tentacle might be appropriate? (Suckers – geddit?)

Yours,
LOUIS FITZPATRICK-ROBERTSON,

Cowes, Isle of Wight.

SOLUTIONS

"Klaxon: evacuation solutions" – *fire alarms*

"Modern Life Expo 2005 will showcase a number of easy solutions to making that day really special!" – *gay wedding convention*

"Lincoln Student Solutions" – *university accommodation*

"Neat Feet Medical Foot Solutions" – *chiropody*

"Doggie Solutions" – *leads and collars*

"Flashlight Films: Jesus Media Solutions" – *religious videos*

All submitted by readers

Lookalike

Captain

Angel

Sir,

Has anyone noticed the likeness between Raphael's Angel and England's Captain, Michael Vaughan?

Yours sincerely,
ANNA WEBSTER,

Toynton All Saints, Lincs.

The only gay

Sir,

Regarding Richard Allen's email about The Village People (Eye 1141), it would appear that both cartoonist and correspondent are slightly confused.

The original line up which lasted from 1977 to 1980 in fact featured two gay members, Felipe Rose (Indian) and Randy Jones (cowboy). This situation lasted until 1980 when Jones left, and was replaced by the not gay Jeff Olsen, reducing the number of gay members to one (Rose the Indian), who as Mr Allen correctly pointed out was not the biker/ leatherman.

Nearly twenty years of reading, and The Village People are the subject of my first letter to the Eye. Not, perhaps, how I imagined things.

Keep up the good work.

Regards,
GARETH DAVIES,

Via email.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I don't think that Sven Goran Eriksson's command of the English language is as good as what you'd like it to be."
TREVOR FRANCIS
(Rob Wilson)

"Even amongst his peers, he [Ronnie Barker] was peerless."
News, BBC1
(Kari Koonin)

"If he [David Davis] wins, he will win with a cloud over his shoulder."
MATTHEW PARRIS, Radio 4
(Tim Hall)

"The image of sperm donors as hard-up students short of cash is changing."
JANE DRAPER, Radio 4
(Richard Coulson)

Lottery balls

Sir,

I am flattered that you think Camelot is running the National Lottery "very nicely indeed", but I'd like to make three points about your story.

*First, £312m is what it cost us to run The National Lottery in 2004/5. The amount retained by Camelot as profit after tax comes to a rather more modest £30m, on turnover of over £4.7bn. This represents a **decrease** in absolute profit since 1999, which in turn reflects a lower overall return to our shareholders from 1 percent, of total sales during the span of the first lottery licence to 0.5 percent during the second. It is also worth pointing out that with costs at around 5 percent of total revenues, Camelot runs the [most] cost-efficient lottery in Europe.*

Second, the modest uplift in running costs since 1999 reflects the ever more complex operation of the lottery, with the roll out of the largest privately-run ISDN network in Europe, more draw-based terminals in retailers than at any time in our history and the launch of lottery games on the internet, interactive television and mobile phones. You did not mention that Camelot also operates the most cost-efficient lottery in Europe, which means more money for the Good Causes.

Finally, these initiatives have allowed The National Lottery to buck the international trend of falling lottery sales – and we are now in our third successive year of growth.

So if there are "trebles all round", it is for the 200,000 projects that have benefited from the £17bn raised by our players – something we and they plan to celebrate on National Lottery Day this 5 November. Surely even the less than charitable Lord Gnome could be persuaded to raise a glass?

Yours faithfully,
MARK GALLAGHER,

Director of Corporate Affairs, Camelot.

HOM SAP

AUSTIN

Letter from **Delhi**

from Our Own Correspondent

ALL donations and aid to help cope with the effects of the earthquake that has devastated Pakistan and a large part of our own Indian-controlled Kashmir will be gratefully received in a country like ours where nearly 40 percent of our 1.2 billion people live below the poverty line.

Shocking as such a statistic may sound, we can still think big when it comes to defence spending, however. According to the US Congressional Research Service (CRS), the most comprehensive assessment of global weapon sales, India made $5.7bn worth of defence purchases last year and was top arms purchaser in the developing world over the 1997-2004 period, accounting for 10 percent of all arms agreements. Developing a delivery capacity for our nuclear weapons carries an even more astronomical cost, but the scale is hidden by clever accounting.

Like it or not, today India is the world's largest defence market, as our predominantly Soviet and Russian hardware needs either upgrading or replacing and our economic resurgence is fuelling dormant military ambitions.

In early September, our navy finalised a $3bn contract with France for six conventional submarines and advanced negotiations with the US to acquire between eight and 12 refurbished maritime reconnaissance aircraft worth more than $2bn. Meanwhile our air force is reviewing proposals for a multi-billion dollar contract for 126 combat aircraft and the Patriot anti-missile defence system, while our army is re-evaluating plans to acquire 1,200-1,500 howitzers over the next decade in a deal valued at more than $3bn to standardise its nearly 190 artillery regiments.

Following the old adage of building the sinews of war in times of peace, India has on order a 39,500-ton Russian aircraft carrier and 20 fighter aircraft as part of our air group for around $2bn and two Russian nuclear-powered submarines for around $700m each.

After Moscow, Israel is our next favourite supplier, particularly at the high-tech end of missiles, radars and pilotless drones. Even you in Britain are benefiting from the bonanza, with a $1.65bn contract for 66 Hawk jet trainers.

Not all these juicy contracts are heading abroad, however. How many other developing countries can boast the capacity to construct a 37,000-ton aircraft carrier locally while all our naval yards are jammed with orders? Under licence we are also building Russian-designed fighter planes and tanks.

The US has traditionally proved an object of suspicion by our military chaps and politicians. But that is now changing, with a combination of political, strategic and financial bullying and by co-opting senior military officers and other influential decision makers. Over the past few months the US has strengthened strategic ties with us by signing a 10-year bilateral defence pact and, in defiance of international norms governing nuclear proliferation, acknowledged Delhi as an atomic weapon state, agreeing to engage with it in civilian nuclear commerce and promising to "persuade" other nuclear states to offer India similar concessions.

And here is the rub. Our genuine security concerns are presently modest. Relations with our two most powerful rivals, China and Pakistan, also both nuclear powers, are better than for some time, with extended peace negotiations holding out the promise of a much improved regional security environment. The armed forces themselves say India is unlikely to engage in outright war over the next two decades, and will instead face the increased threat of local insurgencies.

America, however, appears to be looking to a different kind of future. It seems it is looking to promote India's arms build-up not simply as a commercial opportunity but to bolster us as a "front-line" state against growing Chinese might in the region – especially the Indian Ocean, through which nearly 80 percent of world trade, especially oil and energy supplies, passes. The principal of fighting to the last Indian to defend US interests against Chinese hegemony is one in which Washington seems well versed.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "This is an embarrassing incident," Assistant Police Commissioner Paul Evans admitted at a news conference in Melbourne, "and it clearly shouldn't have happened. The seven dogs completed their intensive training in January, and had been working with Victoria's elite drug sniffing team for several months before when we realised that something was very wrong indeed. So we made enquiries, and discovered that they had all been trained with the incorrect substance. Which means that although they are superb at sniffing out talcum powder, they still have no idea what cocaine smells like."

Assistant Commissioner Evans was explaining why the seven dogs had so far failed to detect a single gram of illegal drugs, despite

having patrolled the streets of Melbourne for the past five months. "They were trained to sniff at people in the street, and to sit next to them if they detected a familiar scent. But they kept identifying well-groomed people who had no trace of cocaine on them, and we eventually began to suspect that something might have misfired with their training. It had. Unfortunately, it seems that the bag of white powder that was used at the training centre had been labelled as cocaine, when it was actually talcum powder. We think this happened due to an administrative bungle, although there may be a more sinister explanation, and we cannot yet rule out police corruption.

"I was very surprised and disappointed when I found out," he added, "and we are now holding a full investigation into what went wrong. Meanwhile, the seven dogs are being retrained so that they will be able to detect drugs. But in the meantime, at least we expect to be able to quickly track down any lost babies. Actually, we get quite a lot of those." *(Weekend Australian, 21-22 May 2005. Spotter: P. J. Hickman)*

– ● –

●*Ever worry about your wife cheating? Want to know where your daughter is late at night? Need to know when your girlfriend's temperature is rising? Then protect her shameful parts with Forget-Me-Not Panties™*

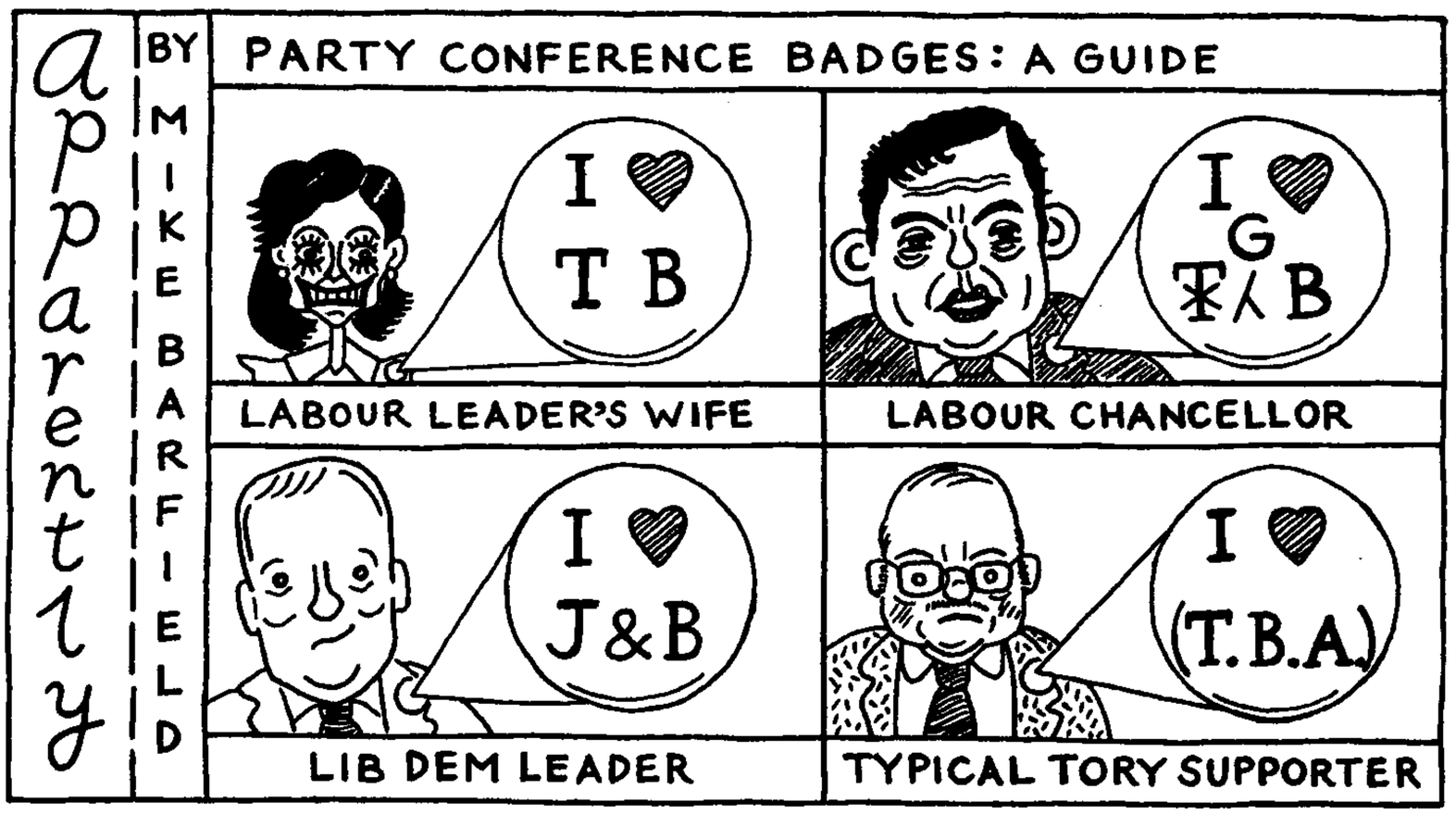
Invisibly woven into the fabric of the garment, this amazing device will answer all of your questions! These digital panties will transmit her location direct to your mobile phone, and even her temperature and heart rate, and she will never even know it's there! Unlike the cumbersome and uncomfortable chastity belts of the past, these state of the art panties are 100% cotton, and use cutting-edge technology to help you protect what matters most. They're discreet, yet they reveal everything! Even that they have been removed!

Forget-Me-Not Panties have built-in GPS and our unique Sensatech© sensor technology. Buy her a pair for every day of the week, and relax in the knowledge that you'll always have the forget-me-not advantage! (Advertisement for Panchira Corporation, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, July 2005. Spotter: Chris Mann)

– ● –

● "I wish to make it clear that we totally welcome Japanese customers in this establishment," the manager of the Tian restaurant in the Dianjiang district of Jilin (north-east China) told reporters, "but only if they take a correct view of history. Unfortunately, there are still many Japanese people who refuse to admit to the past, and we want to say to them that we don't like them. That is why all Japanese customers who enter this restaurant are required to make a formal apology for their country's wartime occupation of China before we will give them a table."

The policy of the Tian restaurant has caused outrage amongst Japanese businessmen, increasing numbers of whom are now working in the city, which suffered greatly during the 1931-45 occupation. However, the manager was unrepentant. "When a Japanese customer enters the premises," he added, "our staff are instructed to question him about the war, and ask him if he is sorry for the many atrocities committed by his countrymen. If he apologises sincerely for the Rape of Nanking, in which 300,000 men, women and children were slaughtered, then we show him to a seat, give him some prawn crackers, and allow him to have lunch here. Otherwise, we tell him to dine elsewhere." *(The Japan Times, 13/7/05. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*



CLARKE REFUSES TO ANSWER DRUG CHARGE

by Our Political Staff **Simon Reefer**

TORY HOPEFUL Ken Clarke today refused to answer allegations that he had smoked cigarettes when he was a middle-aged man.

"It was all a long time ago and there are certain things that the media has no right to know."

Dope

Asked by TV's Andrew Marr on BBC's flagship current affairs programme *Good Marr-ning Britain!*, Clarke repeatedly ducked the question.

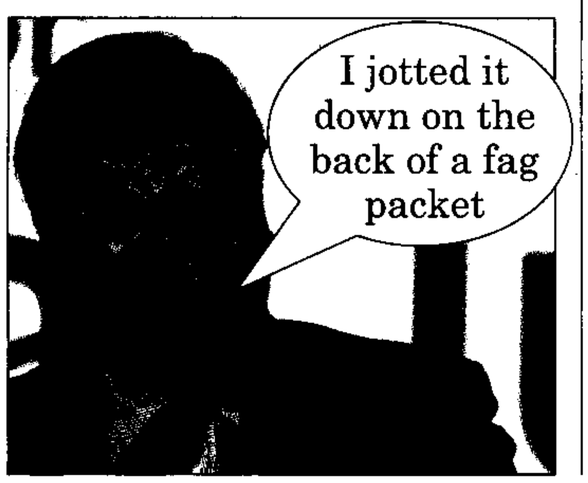
He said, "Look – I have done all the things that normal middle-aged men do.

"I've listened to old jazz records, bought a pair of Hush Puppies, put on a bit of weight and worked for a company trying to sell tobacco to children in the Third World."

Untipped

"But if you are trying to get me to admit to something embarrassing, like being a Conservative, I don't think I should have to tell you yes or no."

CLARKE SPELLS OUT LEADERSHIP MANIFESTO



"Aaron, there's something you need to know – your dad wasn't a motherfucker... he was a wanker"

BEANO BORIS – ONLY IN THE EYE

Cripes! I'm Backing My Friend David To Be Tory Leader!

by **Beano Boris Johnson**

BLIMEY! Just look at the list of candidates and you'll see what I mean. All rum 'uns bar my old chum Spliffy Cameron!!

There's clapped-out Clarke, Dullard Davis, Phoney Fox and Rubbish Rifkind!! Crikey!! What a bunch of losers!

Not only can none of them string two words together, but they didn't even go to Eton!! Blimey!

And what about Mrs Spliffy, eh? Phwoarr! She's a bit of a corker, what?! Memo to Boris: Must invite her to the Beano Lunch, nudge, nudge, and make sure that Bounder Blunkett and Randy Rod Liddle aren't there! I saw her first chaps, so clear orf!

© *The Daily Beanograph.*

My St Cake's Hell

by the Late Dave Geezer

formerly Crispin Fotherington-Thomas Minor *(Ravenscroft 1952-56)*

IN A shocking, no-holds-barred posthumous autobiography, the former Radio Neasden's legendary disc jockey Dave Geezer has revealed how he was the victim of continued homosexual abuse whilst a pupil at the prestigious Midlands independent £25,000-a-term school for boys, St Cake's – motto *'Salve Matelotus!'*.

Geezer describes his former school as a "Hell on Earth" where he walked in daily fear of sexual assault from predatory fellow boys. If he refused to go along with the wishes of older boys, known in Cakese as 'The House Buggers', he would be beaten to death by members of staff.

Nevertheless, he remained fond of the school, spoke often at Speech Days and frequently took his children to see the toilet blocks where the events had taken place.

The current headmaster, Mr R.J. Kipling, said that things had changed a lot since Geezer's day, "When I arrived standards were very low. However, today the school now has lots of girls for the boys to rape and thanks to the widespread availability of recreational drugs, such as cannabis and heroin, they have no interest in sex at all."

Read more of this stuff in Geezer's Schoolboy Memoir, 'The Happiest Days Of My Life', *available to Eye readers at a special price of £35.99 (retail price £14.50).*

WHO WAS THE ST CAKE'S RAPIST? YOU DECIDE

Simply choose which famous Old Cakeian you think did it:

a) **Michael Heseltine**
b) **Michael Palin**
c) **Simon Dee**
d) **The Late Paul Foot**
e) **Charles Darwin**
f) **Sir Philip Sydney**

Letter

Dear Sir,

As an Old Cakeian from the 1930s (Shirtlifers 1932-39), I simply cannot see what all the fuss is about. Mr Geezer's experiences were in no sense unusual and, in fact, in my year it was compulsory for all new boys to submit to this sort of abuse. It never did us any harm nor did we go whining to the newspapers after we were dead!

Yours faithfully,
Sir Herbert Gusset,

E-Wing, The Bodmin Home For The Retired Mentally Ill, Barkworth, Dorset.

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

DAVID CAMERON

What is your vision for spoons?

I think spoons should be attractive, compassionate, relevant and modern. I think they should be well-balanced and improve the quality of life not just for the few, but for the many. Ask not what a spoon can do for you, but what you can do with a spoon.

You yourself come from a privileged background. Does that affect your attitude to spoons?

No, not at all. I think we've moved beyond the old obsession with class – what sort of spoon you eat soup with and that sort of thing.

Could you elaborate a little for our readers on that point?

Well, I like spoons to embrace the best of the traditional past and the exciting design of the future, say a carved wooden handle with the other end made out of plastic or possibly stainless steel – but don't get me wrong, I'm not going to dictate to people what sort of spoons they should use. I'm not Nanny, you know!

Some people say that actually you were born with a silver spoon in your mouth and that this will count against you.

Hey look, guys, I'm in favour of classless spoons and my wife Cherie thinks the same. I'm all spoons to all men. It's what I call the Third Spoon...

Have you ever used a spoon for drug-taking purposes?

How come you don't ask anyone else this question? Why don't you ask me if anything amusing has ever happened to me in connection with a spoon? Then I can show what a human, rounded, funny kind of Tory I am.

Alright then – has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

No.

NEXT WEEK: *Jon Snow 'Me And My Snow'.*

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hallo!

And what an outstanding success – yet again – was this year's annual parish outing to sunny Brighton!

What a pity therefore that some people have got it into their heads that the only thing which happened was the unfortunate incident involving one of our OAPs, Mr Wolfgang Amadeus Looney (I think I've got that right? Please check).

Let me say right away that I have already offered Mr Looney my unreserved apologies, as have many other members of the PCC including Mr Straw, whose important address in support of our good friend the Rev. Dubya, Mr Looney so unforgivably interrupted!

Hey, no one likes to see an old man being chucked out onto the seafront by 'bouncers'. But the fact is that I wasn't even there when Mr Looney was kicked out so, frankly, it was nothing to do with me, which makes it all the more commendable that I should have offered him my apologies!

It's hard enough for any of us to say sorry, isn't it? But how much more difficult it is to say sorry for something you haven't done!

"That's when a big man walks tall", to quote my friend the Rev. Dubya, as Mr Straw was doing when he was so rudely heckled by this senile old man, shouting obscenities and casting a shadow over what was otherwise a glorious day out for us all!

So let's draw a line, shall we under the whole subject of Mr Looney, who is I gather having treatment in the geriatric wing of the St Albion's Hospital for the Mentally Handicapped (shortly to be redeveloped as our new Tesco's)?

But before we move on, let's just spend a few minutes looking at where Mr Looney is coming from. In his day – which was, I'm afraid, quite a long time ago – it was considered perfectly acceptable to disagree with people, and even to interrupt them when they were talking!

Not very modern, that kind of behaviour, is it? Nowadays we have moved on from that kind of negative 'debate'!

Now we all agree on what we think, so there is no need for anyone to step gratuitously out of line, just because they want to make a point (and also, frankly, they may be suffering from a nervous breakdown!).

In today's church, thank goodness, we are all singing from the same hymn sheet. And if we don't, we shouldn't be surprised if we find that we are thrown out into the street by highly-trained anti-terrorist churchwardens, as quite rightly happened to Mr Looney!

And speaking of terrorism, didn't Mr Looney wear a badge proclaiming his loyalty to a notorious and dangerous organisation associated with bombs – the so-called 'CND'?

How were our gallant churchwardens meant to know that Mr Looney was not a suicide bomber, concealing a ton of high-explosive beneath his dirty old anorak?

The Vicar's Dream! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Hey, I've apologised for what happened, but don't you think it is Mr Looney who should be apologising to me?

And to the rest of you as well, who might not be alive today if it hadn't been for the prompt 'firm but fair' action of our security staff who risk their lives daily keeping at bay the likes of Mr Looney, with their crazed ideas of a world dominated by Moslem terrorists.

So let me say that I am happy to accept Mr Looney's apology for his disgraceful behaviour at Brighton, which completely ruined our entire outing, by distracting attention from my own inspiring speech!

Just to remind you, I spoke about all my plans for the parish over the next ten years, and above all my determination to stay on as vicar for as long as it takes, and until a worthy successor finally emerges!

I leave you with this thought. Perhaps Mr Milburn, our former curate, may be ready for the job in a few years time.

Go for it, Alan!

Yours ever,

Tony

PS. I am sorry that we have not had enough space in this newsletter to reprint our treasurer Mr Brown's annual address to the parish. But any parishioners who are interested (probably not a huge number!) can go on the website and read last year's speech, which was much the same (except that this year he's got his figures even more wrong than before!).

Thought for the Week

"Love Thy Neighbour from Hell"

(Book of Asbos 7.11)

Is your neighbour making your life a misery? I know from personal experience how awful this can be – so shouldn't we arrest these people, put them in a secure sink estate and throw away the key? Just a thought, Gordon! T.B.

Salve

A big welcome to our latest overseas visitor, Father Putin of the Russian Extremely Orthodox Church. Patriarch Putin can certainly teach us a thing or two about how to keep order, and he congratulated me on my handling of the dissident Mr Looney. "You should have packed him off to the Siberian salt mines," joked the jovial Soviet Man-of-God, "like I do with all the businessmen whose property I wish to confiscate!" I joked back that we in St Albion's could hardly send people to the salt mines, since Mrs Hewitt is having a crackdown on salt as it is bad for people's health! "That's the whole idea" quipped my irrepressible Russian friend!

A Message From God as told to Rev. Dubya Bush Of The Church Of The Latter-Day Mormons

Well done thou good and faithful servant Dubya! When I didst bid thee to go forth to Iraqistan and verily smite ass thou didst so – yea, verily, yea!

And now when I biddest thee to go smite butt in Iranland I know ye will not fail me even unto the end of the world – which it mighteth well come to – but who careth?! It's all in the cause of defeating the Evil One!!

So stand tall Dubya, mounteth thy trusty steed and DOETH WHAT A MAN HATH GOTTETH TO DOETH.

GOD.

PS: Thus spake myself the Lord to Rev. Dubya and I commandeth him to pass it on to his brother in old Englandland, Pastor Toby Bloom and his lovely wife Cherry Pie.

St Albion's Primary School *Mrs Kelly writes:*

We are now well into the Ramadan term (what we used to call autumn) and I would like to remind parents that the most important contribution the school can make to their children's education is my drive to stamp out fizzy drinks, crisps, sweets and above all those dreadful 'Turkey Twizzlers' that we saw on Jamie Oliver's wonderful TV series! Already we have achieved spectacular results in achieving our 'Eat Well Targets'. 83 percent of children have not eaten only Turkey Twizzlers this term at all - due to the fact that they have a 100 percent truancy record and have not attended school yet this term.

So congratulations all round!

● *On sale now – St Albion Parish News Book Eight "Vicar on the Spot!". Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

POLLY FILLER

SHAME on you Penelope Leach for your report claiming children should be looked after at home by their mothers!

How dare you try and make us working mums feel even more guilty that we do already?

Well, let me tell you, so-called 'Dr' Leach, that whatever your statistics show, some of us happen to know that you are talking nonsense!

Take, for example, my toddler Charlie. If having a working mother is so bad for you then how come Charlie has become the brightest, happiest, most talented, most popular and most well-adjusted child of his generation?

And thanks to his mother working full-time on columns and her best-selling book *Mummy Doesn't Grow On Trees – Reports From the Front Line of 21st Century Mummyhood* (Pearson and Johnson £17.99), Charlie, by the age of 4, has become self-sufficient, mature beyond his years, and fluent in a dozen languages, including Croatian, American, Estonian and Kazak.

Tell me another toddler who knows the Kurdish for "Your mother is a cow", which apparently is a term of the highest praise in Northern Iraq.

And how many other toddlers are so gifted that their parents get a letter from the headteacher saying, "Don't send Charlie to school again"?

How many Mummy's boys, attached round-the-clock to their non-working mothers' apron strings, have the confidence to puncture the bouncy castle at a little friend's birthday party with the cake knife and then tell the parents that it was the au pair, thus getting her the sack!

SO let's hear no more from Penelope Leach – an appropriate name for someone making a living out of the fears and anxieties of decent, ordinary working mothers trying to juggle the family/career/children/celebrity balance.

© Polly Filler.

FRANCE TO JOIN EU?

by Our Brussels Staff **Lunchtime O'Barroso**

THERE were moves last night to allow one of the largest countries in Europe, France, to become a full member of the European Union, despite earlier concern over its refusal to accept the EU's constitution and the fact that the country is full of Muslims.

Said a Brussels spokesman, "Our problem with France is that it consistently fails to comply with EU regulations, it demands massive subsidies for its backward peasant agriculture and, historically, they have an appalling human rights record.

"Frankly," said the spokesman, "they are culturally so different from the rest of us that I cannot see negotiations for their admission to the club ever succeeding."

ON OTHER PAGES: Austria's bid to join human race 'unlikely to succeed' **94**

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Fergus Cashin, former theatre critic of the *Daily Sketch*

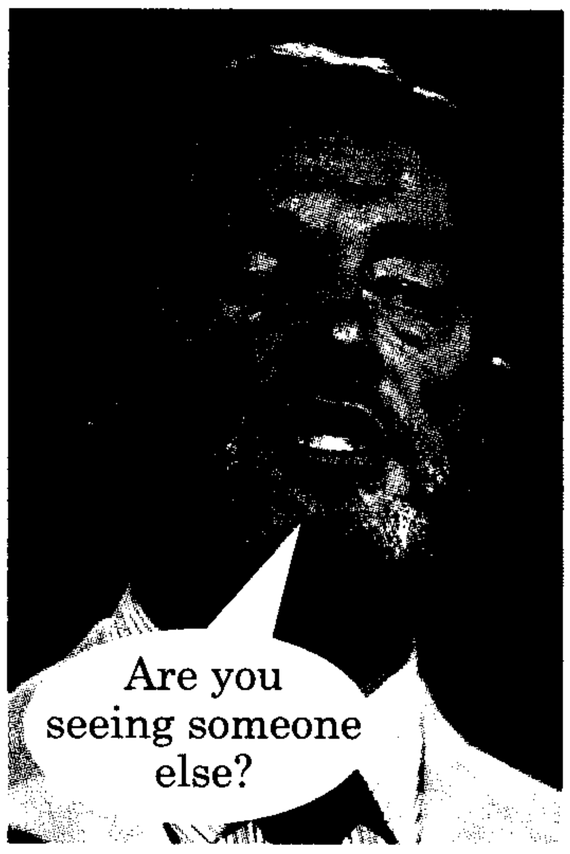
So. Farewell
Then Fergus
Cashin, theatre
Critic and legendary
First-nighter.

"This one will
Run and run."

That was your
Catchphrase.

But now
The curtain
Has come
Down.

E.J. Thribb (17½)



LIVER 'IMPROVING'

by Our Man In The Cromwell Hospital **Dal Alaziz**

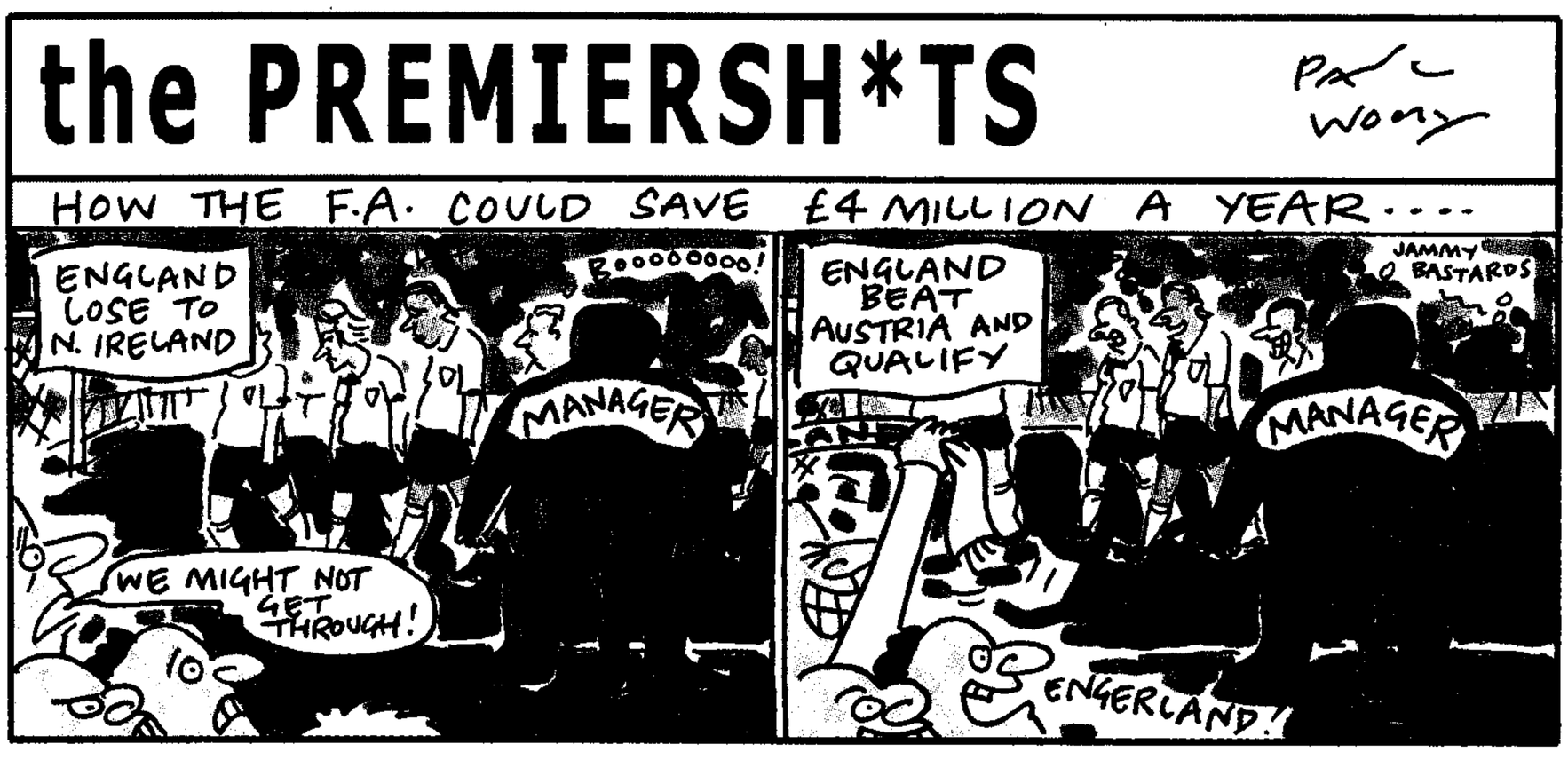
The Liver

HOPES WERE raised yesterday that the world-famous transplanted liver was recovering after severe Best failure.

A spokesman for the hospital said, "We are confident that the liver will be going home at the end of the week with its celebrity and we expect it to return to a normal life of excess alcohol abuse."

He concluded, "The liver was perhaps unlucky to have been given a George Best and the chances of further success are *(cont. p. 94)*

the PREMIERSH*TS



ON OTHER PAGES

NEWSPAPERS were today making a desperate appeal to the public for information leading to more sexy photos of the murdered 18-year-old model Sally Anne Bowman from Croydon.

"There's simply no way we can report on her savage and brutal murder without accompanying the articles with photos of her posing seductively in some sexy, skimpy outfit," insisted all *(cont. p. 94)*

MR DAVID DAVIS
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that Mr David Davis was in some way a towering figure who was the obvious front-runner in the Conservative leadership contest.

Headlines such as "Step forward, Mr Right!", "Only David Can Slay Goliath Blair!", and "DD Gets The Cup!" may have led our readers to believe that Mr Davis was a man of outstanding political ability who was the only candidate capable of restoring the fortunes of this once-great political party.

We now realise in the light of his speech to the Conference that Mr Davis is in fact a hopeless loser whose lacklustre oration was the worst ever given to the assembled Conservative delegates and that Mr Davis would have no credibility whatsoever running a whelk stall, let alone a great political party.

We would like to apologise unreservedly to our readers for any distress this confusion may have caused.

Another Apology – The Conservative Party

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that the Conservative Party was in some sense finished, that it was washed up as a major political force and that it had no hope whatsoever of regaining power within the next 100 years.

We now realise that, on the contrary, the Tories are easily the most exciting and dynamic political party on earth, bubbling with new ideas, its ranks swelled by fervent young delegates and with a host of strong, attractive, sexy vote-winning candidates, some of whom have got fruity wives – see centre spread "Top Tory Totty Lights Up Blackpool". We would like to apologise for any ***(That's enough apologies. Ed.)***

THE Sun
Friday, October 14, 2005

INSIDE
SEX SECRETS OF THE SUDOKU SLAVES p 69

Bugger Off Fatso!

by Our Political Editor
Rupert Murdoch
(as told to Trevor Kavanagh)

OK, so Ken Clarke may have won himself a 10-minute ovation. But then so did Adolf Hitler.

There is no hiding the fact that Fatboy Ken is smoking and drinking himself to death.

And he's keen on Europe.

What more need we say?

The Sun says – there is only one man fit to be Tory leader. And that man is Tony Blair! *(Is that right, Rupert?)*

ON OTHER PAGES: Win A Night In Gaol With Tax Rebel Vicar

TOP COMEDIAN DIES

by Our Showbiz Staff
Quentin Letts

THE world of comedy was in mourning today after one of the country's top funny men died on his arse whilst performing a routine in Blackpool.

David Davis, the man behind such immortal comic lines as 'I can lead the Tory party to victory' and 'I'm the modern face of Conservatism' died a sudden death following a long speech.

Said one shocked observer, "One minute he was everyone's favourite, the next he was a dead duck."

Tributes poured in from his fellow comedians Malcolm Rifkind, Liam Fox, David Cameron and Ken Clarke. They told reporters, "We will all miss him terribly. He has left a great void which we will fill at once."

The audience held a two minute silence after his speech as a mark of respect for the death of Mr Davis' political career.

"It's goodbye from him," said one former fan, "and good riddance to him."

HEFFER JOINS THE EYE!

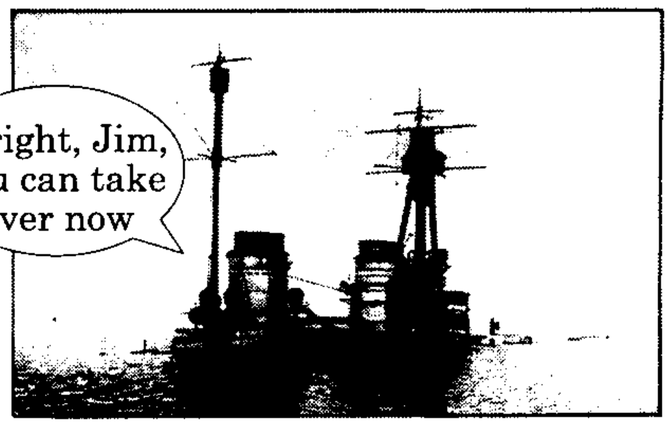
Irascible, irritating, unreadable

NOW THAT the candidates for the Tory leadership have shown their hand, those of us who for a long time have been calling for a fundamental reappraisal of Conservative values can feel fully vindicated.

My own choice, which I have no doubt the party will in due time endorse, is for a young, radical, Tory moderniser – ie, Lady Thatcher, who still embodies the *(cont'd. 1894)*

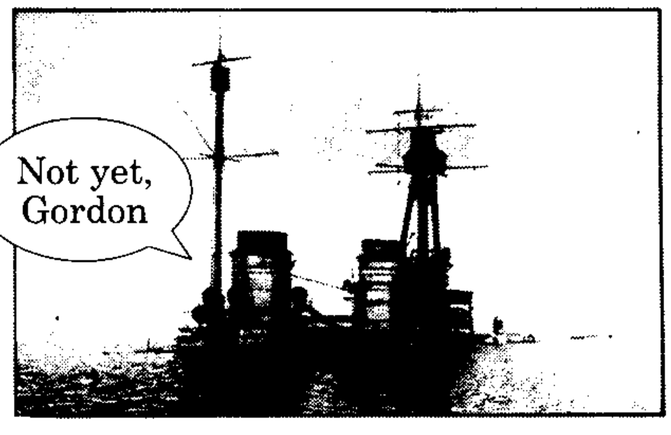
OLD COVERS REVISITED

END OF AN ERA



Wilson on Private Eye Cover 2 April 1976

END OF AN ERA?



Blair in 2005

ROLLS ROYCE PHANTOM
Taxes paid, wheels are extra if required.
£195,000
Sunday Times

Love Is Blind

by DAME SYLVIE KRIN, author of La Dame Aux Camillas, Born To Be Queen, Heir of Sorrows , etc.

THE STORY SO FAR: Suave pensions' supremo David Blunkett has whisked off his new love, Gilly Northern, for a special Romantic Autumn Break Weekend at the palatial Thames-side Ramada Cliveden (£95 for two, breakfast not included, pets welcome).

Now read on...

THE shining orb of the October moon hung in a starlit sky, bathing the famous gardens of Berkshire's most celebrated country house hotel in a silvery sheen.

The rippling waters of the ancient River Thames reflected back its radiance, as two swans glided silently by.

Yes, this was a night for lovers.

And there, on the Nancy Astor Terrace, leaning casually over the 18th-century stone balustrade, their arms lovingly intertwined, were the handsome, debonair former Home Secretary, elegantly dressed in a white tuxedo, and Gilly Northern, the beautiful blonde Assistant Regional Manager of Callard and Bowser Properties.

From inside came the soft strains of the Christopher Silvester Suppertime Sextet playing a medley of hits from the long-running musical Les Miserables.

"Happy, darling?" whispered the love-struck former leader of Sheffield Council into his companion's delicate ear.

"Of course, David," she murmured in reply. "Who wouldn't be? What with the moon, and the stars, and the swans, and this divine music. Which reminds me, I've always wanted to be an opera singer. You don't know anyone, do you...?"

David thought for a moment. Of course he knew someone. It was not for nothing that he was the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, one of the most powerful members of the government.

"I could have a word with Tessa Jowell," he smiled. "She's the Culture Minister, you know. And a good friend of mine..."

There was a discreet cough at his elbow. It was Weatherspoon, Cliveden's legendary Maître d'Hôtel. "Excuse me, sir, your table for dinner is ready. And, of course, a bottle of our best Tesco champagne is included in the 'Lovebirds Two Nights For The Price Of One' package."

"THESE oysters go down a treat," said the hirsute New Labour high-flier, wiping his neatly-trimmed beard with an immaculate linen serviette, embroidered with the legend *'Property of the Ramada Group – Do Not Remove'*. "Beats fish 'n' chips any day.

"We have so much in common," he went on, "a love of fine food, fine music, fine poetry – and perhaps, who knows, we may discover an even greater bond...?"

"It's a lovely thought," Gilly replied distractedly, "but tell me more about these influential people you know in the opera business."

As if by some telepathy, Maestro Silvester raised his baton, and his sextet launched into their musical *'Tribute To The Three Tenors'*.

Gilly couldn't resist joining in, as the unforgettable opening bars of Nessun Dorma floated across the polished floor of the Lord Halifax Ballroom.

"What a beautiful voice you have," said David. "Would you like to have my babies?"

Before a startled Gilly could react to David's outburst, the venerable Maître d' appeared beside their table.

"Is everything to your satisfaction, Mr Blunkett?" he enquired.

"It is so far," joked the man once hailed as Britain's most successful education secretary, "but I'm hoping it'll get even better as the night goes on!"

The Maître d', smiling discreetly, refilled the two champagne flutes on the table before him. "If I may say so, sir, it is just like the old days, when this wonderful old house welcomed great statesmen, such as yourself, and the beautiful young ladies they had met in London."

The aged factotum's eyes lit up, as he remembered the amorous ghosts of yesteryear.

"Ah, yes," he said half to himself, "those were the days. Mr Profumo. Pretty girls. Midnight parties round the swimming pool."

His reminiscence was interrupted by the sound of Gilly's mobile phone playing Mozart's immortal G-Minor Symphony.

"Oh, hullo, darling," she chirped into the phone. "I can't talk now. I'll have to ring you back in a couple of minutes."

"Who was that?" David asked casually, trying to keep the note of suspicion out of his voice.

"Oh, just someone from the office," she replied breezily.

"What? At 11 o'clock on a Saturday night?" David countered, beginning to show a hint of impatience.

"It's a bungalow in Wokingham," she explained hurriedly. "It's just come on the market. Will you excuse me? I'll just go and sort it out..."

"THE bar's closing, sir. Would you like another pint of Boddington's – or has sir perhaps had enough?"

David heard the Maître d's voice as if from a long way away.

"Now that we've agreed that madam is not coming back, I've taken the liberty of transferring you from the Mandy Rice Davies Honeymoon Suite to a single room on the 6th floor. It is a considerable saving for you and your dog.

"Easy does it, sir," he went on, as he guided the forlorn man-of-affairs across the now deserted dance floor towards the lift.

"And, by the way, I've just remembered how it all turned out for that minister I was telling you about – Mr Profumo – and his young ladyfriend.

"He was caught out lying and he had to resign. He ended up doing charity work in the East End. Terribly sad..."

At that moment the band launched into the final number of the evening, and Maestro Silvester himself took the microphone to sing his signature tune, *'When Your Lover Has Gone'*.

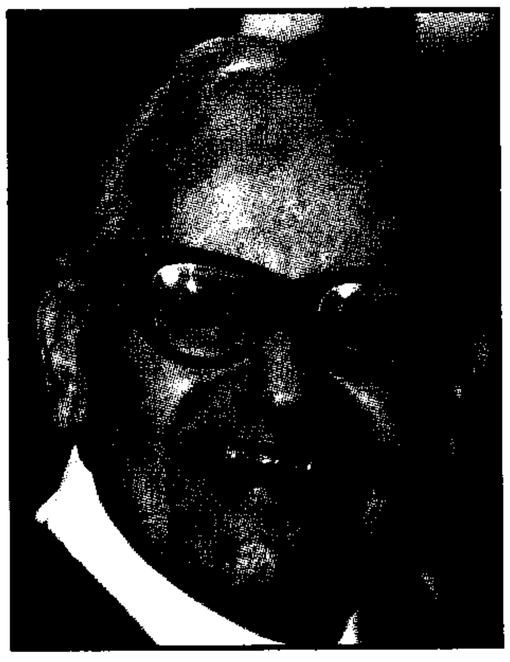
Outside in the garden the moon had long since vanished behind the clouds, and the swans had gone their separate ways.

© The Gnome Hellenic Cruise Collection 2005, 'A Voyage Into Romance'.

Daily Mail

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2005 40p

PAEDO MAN DEAD



By Our Entire Staff
Paul 'the Dirty' Dacre

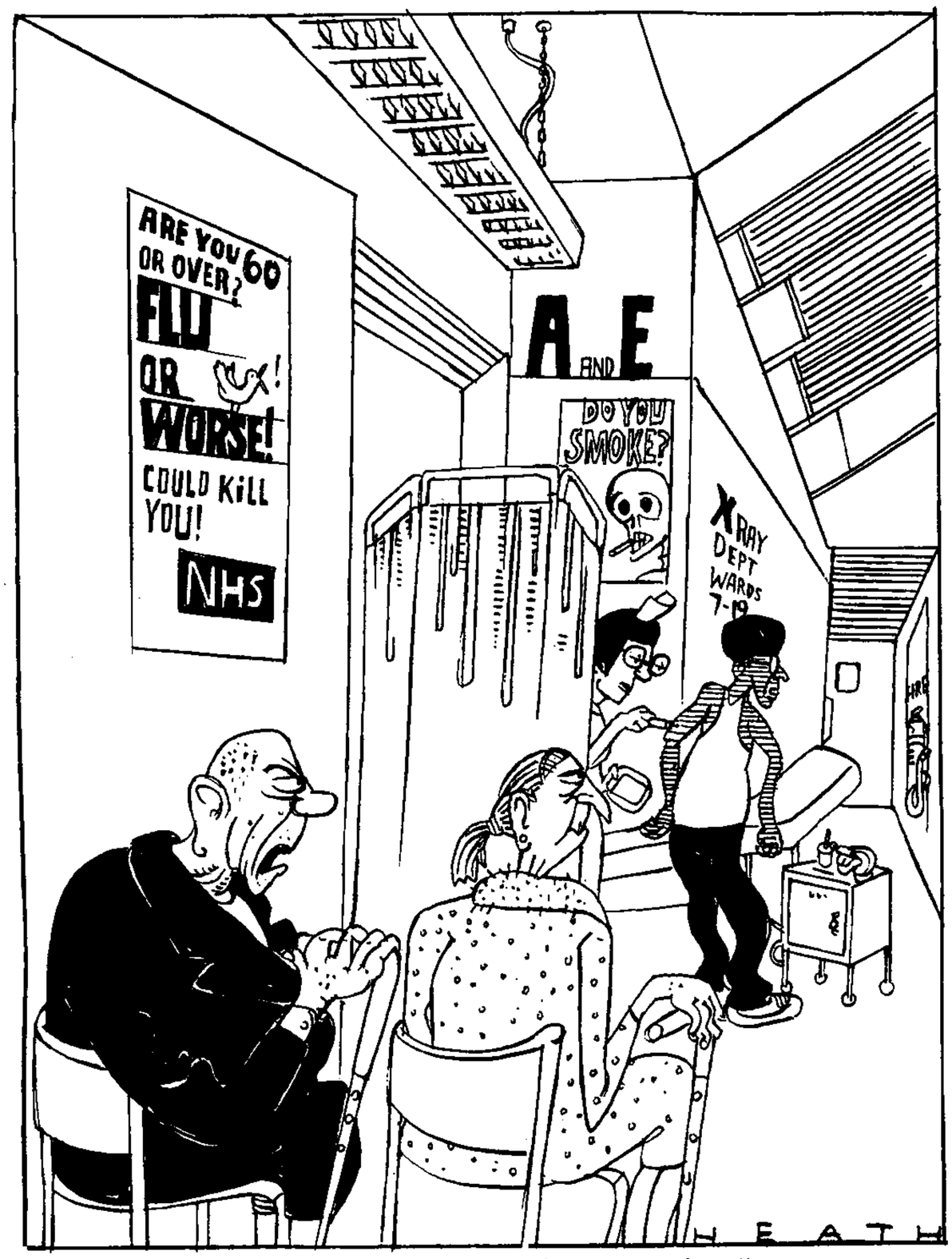
THE FATHER of a wanted paedophile died today, no doubt of shame and heart-break at the disgrace his son had brought on the family.

Friends of the dead man told the Daily Mail last night, "We have no wish to talk to you – go away".

But we can reveal that if they had spoken to us, they would have told us that the dead man was in the depths of despair after the revelations in the Daily Mail about his son's twisted paedo activities.

Today, there is no cause for laughter, only tears.

ON OTHER PAGES ■ Laugh again at Ronnie's immortal gags 25-94 **PLUS** ■ Will Ronnie's Death Cause Collapse In House Prices? 74 ■ Paedo-Sudoku – It's the new Daily Mail craze for all the family. Win a free Best of Two Ronnies DVD 80



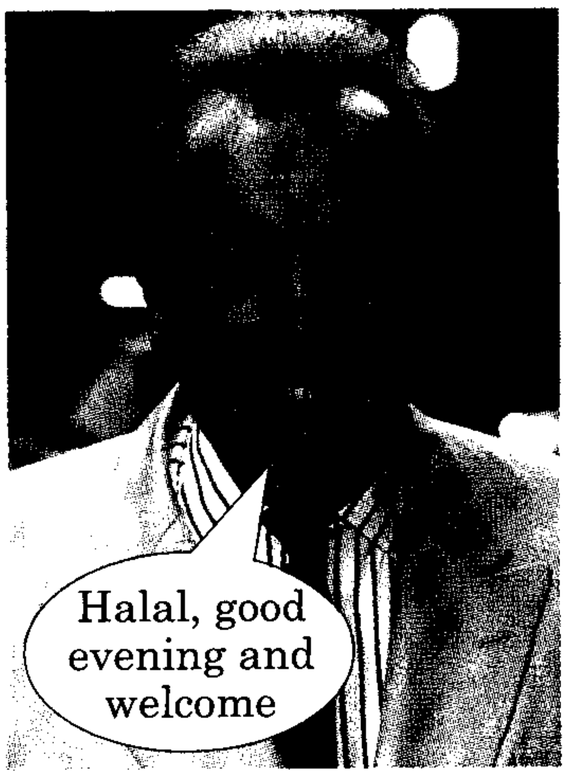
"They come over here, taking our jabs..."

The Ronnie Barker Who Knew Me

RONNIE BARKER was very lucky to work with me at the start of his television career. I am sure he would have been the first to admit that he owed his subsequent success to that early lucky break.

© *J. Cleese.*

FROST JOINS AL-JAZEERA



POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Ronnie Barker: actor, writer, comedian

So. Farewell
Then
From me.

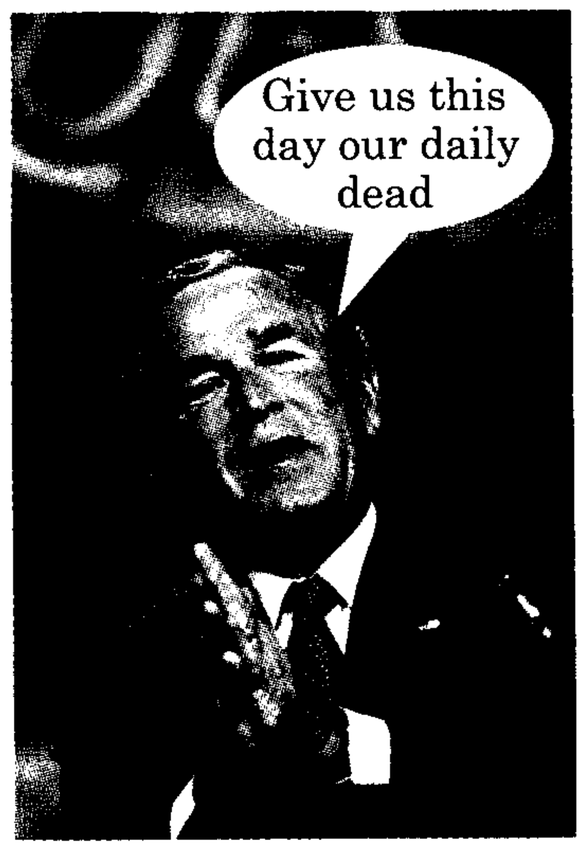
And so
Farewell then
From him.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

This Week's Top Stories

● **Jude and Sienna** – It's over or it isn't **1,2,3,4**
● **Did Shakespeare Write Shakespeare's Plays?** Amazing new research **5**
● **If John Lennon hadn't been shot, would he be alive today?** by Maureen Cleave **6**
● **Why I'm Too Shy To Give Interviews** – Melvyn Barg Interviews Alan Bennett about his mum, dad, aunt, old lady in van, favourite tram, department stores in Leeds, cancer *(That's enough Bennett. Ed.)* **7**
● **England Not Much Good At Football** – Exclusive **8**
● **Thousands Die In Pakistan Earthquake** – No Britons named **94**

DUBYA'S PRAYER TO GOD



"Our window box has been designated a brownfield site.."

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE
Cert U. Directed by: Joe Wright
Starring: Jane Austen, Keira Knightley, Matthew Macfadyen, Brenda Blethyn, Donald Sutherland

Odeon (Guildford) leaflet

DIARY

ERIC IDLE

October 1: LA. Bollocks! Crikey – what a very Pythonesque way to start a diary! Bollocks – and bollocks again! Classic! Cleesy and Jonesy and Paliny would be having a right old giggle, if only they could hear me saying "Bollocks"!

You know, what I always loved about our comedy was that it respected no boundaries – and roughly three trillion and thirty five people around the world – including my mum! – seem to agree with me! It's the job of a comedian to tell folk what they don't want to hear. Comedians, you see, tell the truth through a sense of moral outrage. To us, nothing is taboo. We tell it like it is. So bollocks, bollocks and yet more bollocks!

October 2: Detroit. On a one-man tour of the US of A – and I'm that one man!!! So I'm keeping a diary – not a diarrhoea, 'cos that would leave the pages far too messy! – on the basis that I wanted to get something down (apart from the wife's skimpy panties, that is!).

October 3: Michigan. Robin Williams drops round and completely adores the show – it cracked him up. And that guy knows a thing or two about laughter! Of course, backstage Robin was irrepressibly hilarious, giggling uncontrollably at everything I said.

No one is faster than Robin. He's the Einstein of gags – and I don't mean gags of the cloth-tied-round-the-mouth variety! He can take a concept and run with it, turning it upside down and round and round with a range of funny foreign voices and madcap facial expressions! The guy's a fucking genius, and I don't use the word lightly (genius, I mean – not fucking! Which isn't to say I don't like a bloody good shag – far from it!)

So Robin – the man's a God, but bloody nice with it, unlike the real God, who can get tremendously bad-tempered!! – comes backstage and starts one of his brilliant improvs on the word 'backstage'. "It's not the same as BACKSIDE" he says, hilariously, in the accent of a crazy Russian scientist, before switching into his finest Arnold Schwarznegger voice and adding, "Because if we slipped BACKSIDE, we might truly be mistaken for ONE OF THOSE" – and he said "one of those" in his hilarious camp L.A. hairdresser's voice! Classicarooni!

October 4: Boston – home of the worst tea party in the world ever!!! Actually, on a more serious note, it took considerable courage for the Americans to rebel against the British imperialists at that time – and since then they've created what is, for all its faults, a truly great country, a country where everyone can dream their dreams – and find they become reality.

Last night's show was another smash, a lot of people saying it's the best I've ever done (fivers all round, as promised lads! No – only kidding, they genuinely believed it was the best, for which I thank them).

At the start of the second half, I took off on an amazing flight of solo fancy (wouldn't mind flying over your fancy, darling!) *(Stop that this minute! – Ed)* involving the notion of an irate customer going into a pet shop – and complaining that the parrot he'd bought the day before was DEAD!!!

Twenty minutes later, having improvised my way hilariously through all the variations concerning dead parrots, I had the audience in total stitches! In fact, some of them told me later it reminded them of Python at its best. And no praise comes higher than that, forsooth. *(What do you mean – for tooth? Are you some sort of dentist? – Ed)*. Well, bollocks to you, Ed – and why not invest in a hearing aid while you're about it!!!

October 5: Houston. We totally kicked ass last night – but I don't mean literally!! On second thoughts, I've got nothing against ass – in fact now I come to think of it I wish I had a very naughty part of my anatomy against a sexy young lady's ass at this very mo – particularly if she was wearing a wispy thong over her exquisite buttocks! I don't half fancy that Scarlett Johanssen! Oooh – down, boy! Down!!

October 6: New York. They call it the Big Apple – well, it's certainly big, but it doesn't taste very fruity to me, at least not when I last licked the pavement!!

There is a totally hilarious moment when I check into the hotel. "Don't I recognise you, sir?" the concierge said in a distinctively American accent. Yup, you guessed it, he was a huge Python fan – and I was his favourite! He asked if I'd do the silly walk for him, but I said that wasn't actually my one, so then he asked for the Lumberjack song, but I suggested my famous *(more like infamous!!! – Ed.)* Dead Cod sketch. He looked a bit blank (some fan!) but I did it for him anyway, right there in the lobby of the New York Intercontinental, with everyone watching – and by the end I was in absolute stitches!

Paul Simon, Randy Newman, Steve Martin, David Crosby, Bill Murray. All amazing, talented guys – and guys I know very, very well. And they know me very well too, they've all been to my house, bless 'em. I guess it's because I was born with the very precious gift of being able to make people laugh.

Seriously – being able to list personal friends of that calibre is very humbling.

Onstage tonight, I gain an almighty roar of laughter just by saying, "I didn't expect the Spanish Inquisition!" I don't know where it came from – it was totally improvised! – but I must remember to incorporate it into the act, for added giggles *(Did you say Biggles? – Ed.)* (Why do you think I'd fancy a butch English air-ace, Ed? I'm not gay, you know – and my delicious wife will attest as much after our next Olympic shagathon!)

October 7: Washington. The audience loved me, and everyone's telling me I've never been so funny, which is nice. Touring is boring *(There's a song in there somewhere! – Ed)* but it does have the advantage that you meet a bevy of lovely ladies, and – here's a thought – beneath their clothes they all have breasts. Breasts – I love that word! Breasts, breasts, breasts, breasts, breasts.

Now you're talking! All men love breasts. Best breasts. There's a classic Pythonesque joke in there somewhere, struggling to get out – or am I talking about my naughty bits, at present struggling to get out of my trousers? Naughty, naughty! More tea, vicar?!!

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

TO HAVE ANY CHANCE OF KEEPING YOUR DRIVING LICENCE YOU WILL HAVE TO PERSUADE THE COURT...
...THAT IT WOULD CAUSE REAL HARDSHIP IF YOU WERE UNABLE TO DRIVE...
I SEE...
WELL, LOSING MY LICENCE WOULD RESULT IN TERRIBLE HARDSHIP...
MY POOR CHAUFFEUR GETS VERY FEW DAYS OFF AS IT IS...

Literary Review

Rock Bottom

Extreme: My Autobiography
Sharon Osbourne
(Time Warner, £18.99)

Bigger Than Hitler, Better Than Christ
The Rik Mayall
(HarperCollins, £18.99)

IT'S showbiz autobiography season once again, and tables at Waterstone's are suddenly groaning with the expensively bound ramblings of the famous and barely literate. No wonder children these days aspire only to celebrity, for this is one of the more extraordinary rewards: the permission to write and have published 372 pages of absolutely anything you want to say. No one will edit you, you will get tons of money for it, and gullible punters will buy copies for each other at Christmas in their tens of thousands. The books don't need to be any good, just big. Never mind the quality, feel the width. Sharon Osbourne starts as she means to go on (and on) in the acknowledgements, where she thanks Sir Elton John and David Furnish, as all celebrities now must, whether they have met them or not. She also thanks her "loyal friends: there are not a lot of you, but you all know who you are. Thanks for always being there for me and even though I never call or write when I say I will, you accept me the way I am and I love you all for that."

Just as well that her loyal friends know who they are, because she is obviously not too sure. Once we're into the book proper, Sharon gets down to business: boasting how rich she is. "I have more chandeliers than most people have light bulbs," she says early on, maintaining a one-boast-per-page ratio with the single-mindedness that has shaped her long and terrifying career. We soon learn that Ozzy is a morning person, while Sharon loves her bed. "Sleep has always been my way out. My one escape." It's not a happy life. "I light the most expensive candle I have to hand... Burning money is about the only way I know to feel good about myself."

Sharon isn't just very much richer than you, she's more miserable too. "I want to wake up in the morning and not feel terrified of the knock of the door" (page 49). "I sometimes wonder what my life would have been like if I had bonded with my mother" (page 34). After several gruesome pages describing her abortion, she reveals that the only person she had to talk to afterwards was her cat. These days it's her dog. She has come a long way.

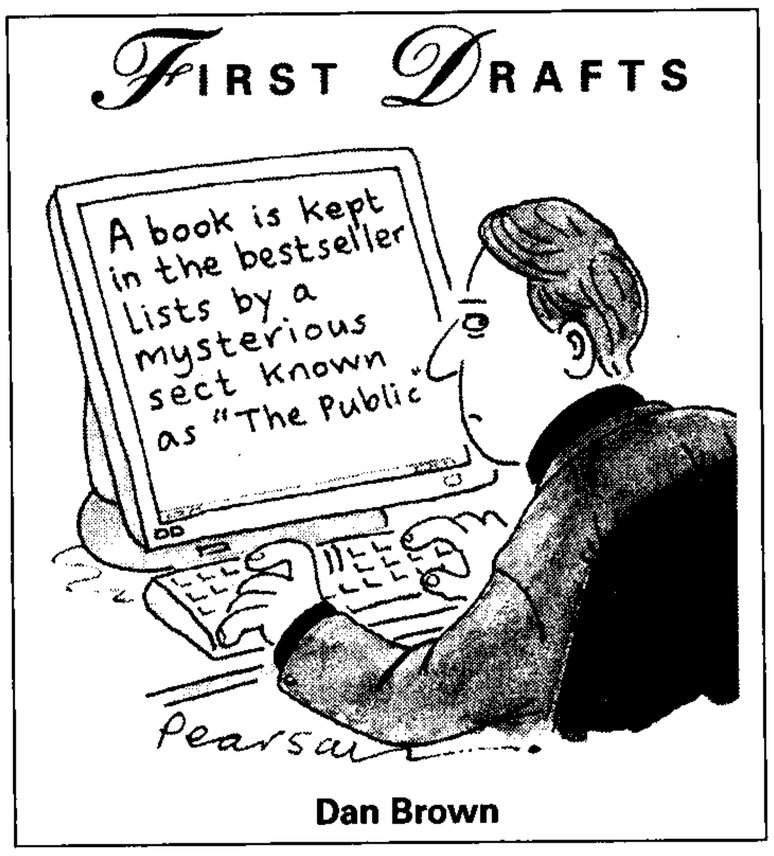
And so it goes on, an incontinent gush of therapy-scented bilge, interspersed with tales of what an evil bastard her dad was. Some of it is beyond parody. "From downstairs I can hear 'Touch Me And I Bleed'... Ozzy's rock opera about Rasputin is finally coming together, and it's fucking brilliant." It's also transcendentally vulgar, several facelifts beyond anything the rest of us could muster. "By this time I'm laughing so much, I'm wetting myself, so holding my crotch I run for the door, my hand already soaking." Poor bladder control becomes one of the book's more memorable motifs. You'd think twice about inviting the Osbournes round to dinner, unless your dining room was unusually well drained.

Sharon Osbourne's book is of the car crash school of autobiography: when he's not biting the heads off wildlife or shitting in people's shoes, Ozzy is beating her up or trying to strangle her, but she still loves him.

Rik Mayall's book, by contrast, is more unusual. Rather than write it as himself, he has adopted the sturdy and familiar character he portrays in nearly all his TV shows: self-absorbed, self-indulgent, foul-mouthed, obsessed with wanking and poo poos and girls in a way that might be considered faintly immature in someone 30 years younger. You could almost look upon it as a bold experiment, a sort of extended post-modern satire on the whole concept of the showbiz autobiography, if it were not for one small problem: the book is unreadable.

There are a few good gags, but you have to wade through pages and pages of masturbation, both literal and metaphorical, to find them. Some sentences make you want to weep. Describing his adolescence: "I was like the outsider and I don't mean like the one in that shit book by Albert what's-his-face." It's a little like being shouted at by a 12-year-old with attention deficit disorder and Tourette's and a bucket of cocaine he sticks his head in from time to time. Who is the book aimed at? Surely no one old enough to be able to read it.

Still, celebrities, eh? Even if their book fails utterly, it's not their problem. It's the problem of the poor foolish bastard who commissioned it, who may not be sleeping too well right now.



Dan Brown

Psycho-ology

Lunar Park
Bret Easton Ellis
(Picador, £16.99)

It is an altogether curious paradox. Bad American politics have the average liberal broadsheet practically spitting its disdain; but bad American art rates a guaranteed thousand or so admiring words in the *Guardian Saturday Review*. Which brings us in a roundabout way to that garlanded totem pole of the modern American novel, that devious champion of the new Yankee solipsism, Mr Bret Easton Ellis.

Yes sir, young – well, middle-aged now – Bret here is just the cutest, most post-modern self-referencer on the block. I mean, who else would sit studiously down to write one of those archetypal Bret Easton Ellis horror-fests – the stacked corpses, the desecrated suburban bedrooms – whose spavined hero just happens to be, well, Bret Easton Ellis. Like *Glamorama*, his last bug-eyed sleaze charivari, *Lunar Park* is awash with real people (and I *really hope* some diligent lawyer cleared the scene in which our man shoots the sherbet with his fast friend Jay McInerney) and a whole heap of bleary projections of life in the Madison Avenue fast lane.

What happens? Well, fresh out of re-hab and with a couple of decades of alcoholic and sexual excess not in the least behind him, our man is marking time in the LA hinterland, lately married to the Hollywood actress mother of his son and living in a house described by *Elle Décor* as "minimalist global eclectic with an emphasis on Spanish revival" but with "elements of mid-century French chateau and a touch of sixties Palm Springs modernism". Diversion – Bret and the missus are having counselling about their low-fi sex life – is provided by desultory teaching at the local arts college, the outline of an as yet unwritten novel entitled *Teenage Pussy* and an as yet unconsummated dalliance with an enticing postgrad named Aimee.

Into this – well, it would be hard to call the winded Californian dreamscape an idyll – stalks a whole heap of trouble. Something is making the back garden leak slime and leaving scratch-marks on the bedroom doors. Someone turns up at the Halloween party impersonating Patrick Bateman, the homicidal maniac from Ellis's much reprobated third novel, *American Psycho*. A cream-coloured 450 SL of the kind previously owned by Bret's late and much resented father is trailing him all over the place and a series of anonymous emails appearing on the early morning computer screen, all sent at 2.40 am, which just happens to be the moment of the old man's death. Meanwhile, out in the wider world, society continues to brood about the spate of inexplicably missing children, while an awestruck cop arrives on the doorstep to report that the patterns of *Psycho*'s gore extravaganza are being precisely mimicked by the endeavours of a local serial killer.

Zipping intently on beyond its 300th page, *Lunar Park* is oddly broken-backed: half a bug-eyed psycho-drama, half a rueful little satire about the LA celeb lifestyle, where parents attending the school PTA are presented with a complimentary "stress basket" and even five year olds have bodyguards. The problem about all these West Coast neurotics, drowning in affluence and insecurity, is that their anatomist hasn't a clue where he stands in relation to them. Neatly enough, the outline of *Teenage Pussy* offers a clue to this deep-seated confusion. Clearly intended as a send-up of lousy modern American writing, it contains several formulations – notably the buxom sexpot who giggles "amply" – that are exactly the kind of thing Bret writes himself. Sandwiched between the routine unpleasantness, meanwhile, are a number of elegiac look-backs in which, for example, Bret watches the local kids assembling for Trick or Treat and reflects that "There were no ballerinas or witches or hoboes or ghosts – none of the simple homemade costumes from my childhood – and I was getting old." Yes indeed. Bret, baby, I felt like yelling out: it sure is a godawful world out there, and let me tell you, you helped make it that way.

SNIPCOCK & TWEED
IT HELPS YOU PICK UP WOMEN!
THE GAME NEIL STRAUSS
ISN'T THAT NEIL STRAUSS BOOK ABSOLUTELY GHASTLY?
YOU'RE SO SO RIGHT!

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ MORE on the attempts of HMV, which already owns the Waterstone's chain, to take over Ottaker's as well.

The office of fair trading (OFT) has now heard the case against as set out by the Publishers' Association and will report in early November. While the publishers and their advisers are confident the OFT will see sense and refer the bid to the competition commission, HMV and its team are confident the OFT will wave the bid through.

Only one camp can be right, of course; but HMV's £96.4m show of bravado is masking one fairly unpalatable fact: in trading terms predator is doing just about as well (or badly) as prey. Both are profitable, but the trends augur ill.

In the first 21 weeks of its financial year, sales at Waterstone's fell 6.4 percent, while in the four weeks to 16 July, Ottakar's like-for-like sales fell by a similar amount. If the HMV takeover is successful, it will give a short-term boost to the victor; but who's to say that a year or so down the line, things will not be just as bad if not worse, with no one left to take over, and the supermarkets shifting pallets of pulp at ruinous discounts, forcing the publishers to take in washing?

In the event of an HMV victory, there is one glimmer of hope: some stores in areas where both chains are present will have to be sold off. Will there be enough of them for James Heneage or someone like him to buy and start afresh? Or will there be a rebirth of independent bookselling to fill the void? Perhaps... but don't hold your breath.

'Bookworm'

REVIEWING THE SITUATION...

ARTS editor Norman Lebrecht turned his hand to literary criticism in the London *Evening Standard* on 29 September, dismissing the novel *Oliver Twist* as "undeniably anti-semitic".

His argument rested on the fact that Fagin was a vicious caricature of a stereotypically mercenary Jew and – crucially – based on no real-life source. Fagin, it would seem, was simply a product of Charles Dickens' avidly racist imaginings. "There is nothing in the London crime statistics of the 1830s to suggest that Jews controlled gangs of boy pickpockets... As for Fagin, there is no telling where he came from," wrote Lebrecht.

Perhaps the *Standard*'s arts editor should consult the GCSE York notes on *Oliver Twist*. "The character of Fagin," we are told, "is based on a real Victorian fence, a notorious Jewish criminal named Ikey Solomons". Solomons, an East End Jew, apparently controlled several gangs of child pickpockets and was imprisoned in Newgate in 1831. He has been the subject of several biographies (with informative titles such as *The First Fagin*) and information about him and the inspiration he provided for Dickens' novel is readily available on the internet.

Lofty Lebrecht is known for demanding high standards of academic accuracy from his hacks; and long-standing arts journos offering contributions on literary topics have been known to be rebuffed on the grounds that they are not "experts". As he concluded of Dickens and *Oliver Twist*: "What the great social campaigner was spouting in this novel was ignorance". Quite unlike the author of the article himself, then...

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Black is back, but purple is the new teal." – Jess Cartner-Morley, *Guardian Weekend.*

"Is alcohol the new short skirt?" – Jenni Murray on *BBC Radio 4*'s Woman's Hour during a discussion on sexual attacks on young women.

"Is 'I' the new 'e'?" – Kirsty Lang, Front Row, *BBC R4.*

"Islam is the new rock 'n' roll." – Andrew Calcutt, lecturer in cultural studies at the University of East London, *Spiked Online.*

"If food is the new rock 'n' roll and chefs are its gods, the Abergavenny Food Festival has to be the new Glastonbury, right?" – Carole Cadwalladr, the *Observer.*

YOUTH WORKER
Steyning
Can you help young people reach their dull potential?
Mid Sussex Citizen

LIBRARY NEWS

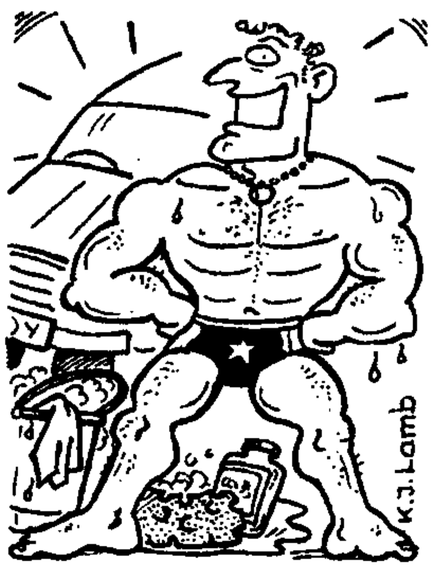
■ BIRMINGHAM'S plan for a new £147m library, split between two sites, puts other projects, such as Brighton's tiddling £14m Jubilee library, in the shade.

The steering group of Brum councillors and librarians set up to "inform the planning process" was certainly thorough in its research, visiting UK libraries in London, Bournemouth, Bradford, Leicester, Manchester and Essex to see how others do it, not to mention vital fact-finding trips to Canada, the US, Singapore and Egypt.

Alas, while the group successfully disposed of tens of thousands of pounds on its international junkets, Brum was less successful in the money-raising department. Culture secretary Tessa Jowell has turned down the city's request for a £55m PFI deal to underpin the scheme, leaving the grandiose plan in ruins.

I, like many others, began to doubt him after Street Legal (1978), but then, in 1997, came Time Out of Mind, a sensationally original album that made me realise with what a gigantic figure I was sharing my time on earth.

BRYAN APPLEYARD on Bob Dylan,
Sunday Times Magazine



I had an intense experience the first time I washed my car. I was 45, and I felt that I had at last become a man.

MICHEL HOULLEBECQ's 'A-Z of culture',

Guardian Saturday Review

The Politics of Public Washroom Space

This session aims to bring together scholars from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds to address the politics of public washroom spaces. Scholarly investigation of public washrooms is relatively rare, despite the fact that these spaces have become highly politicised in recent years. Activists have critiqued the regulation of public washrooms with growing frequency and effect, and have made new demands of and for their production and regulation. Anti-poverty and homelessness activists are lobbying for increased access to spaces for basic acts of social reproduction, queer and transgendered activists are demanding alternatives to the strict binary gendering of these public spaces while (dis)ability activists are calling for 'public' spaces to reflect the range of embodied abilities of the body politic [continues]

Call for papers, annual general meeting of the American Association of Geographers

Pseuds Corner

There is a worrying moment when you first cut into the terrine. Will it fall apart like a jilted bride? Or will it remain iron-jawed and firm, like a resolute groom? The terrine here does not falter at the altar, for it has been beautifully constructed and prepared, with generous reams of duck foie gras running through a porky coffin, while a few grains of sea salt are scattered on top of the meaty slice, like tiny icebergs in a dun sea...

JAN MOIR visits the Galvin Bistrot de Luxe, *Telegraph Weekend*

Female friendship is a composite of abstractions; incomprehensible by concrete nouns. It is not golf, ale, Andy McNab novels. It is love, fear, secrets, dreams. This is both its beauty and its horror. When it works, female friendship represents the absolute absence of loneliness. When it goes wrong, the potential exists for absolute distruction. It is not your company which is being dismissed, but your soul [continues for quite some while]

VICTORIA COREN, 'Why Women Bond',
Observer

Pseuds Corporate

Innovative & inclusive engagement is necessary in reflecting citizen priority as opposed to professional consideration. Key to relevant delivery involving the public is our active citizen programme spearheaded by the ReGenerate Charitable Trust, where reach and respectful listening opens the possibility of empowered bottom up sustainable transformational change. Street Champions and other members of the public in addition to practitioners will populate GIS databases through a variety of means including direct internet interface.

Policy document from the Birmingham Community Safety Partnership

CONTRIBUTORS: Don Salter, Craig Thomas, Rael Martell, Carolyn Kirk, Andrew C.G. Cook, Elaine Mitchell.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

CANCER TREATMENT

Herceptin for all?

HEALTH secretary Patricia "I saved Rover and I'll save the NHS" Hewitt (pictured right) is fast discovering the side effects of promoting a consumerist culture within the NHS.

Her hasty promise on 5 October that the anti-cancer drug trastuzumab (Herceptin) will be made available in the NHS within weeks of gaining a licence pandered to a campaign in the *Sun* and the high-profile case of Somerset foster mother Barbara Clark. The move will financially cripple the already indebted primary care trusts and is based on bad science.

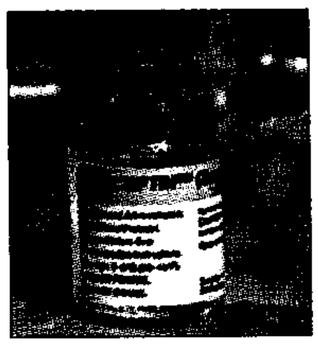
A blanket decision to fund Herceptin for non-metastatic breast cancer needs to be based on proper scrutiny of data from peer-reviewed publications, and be based on an assessment of the relative cost benefits set against all the other advances queuing up to be funded in the NHS. The media keep repeating the "fact" that Herceptin will cut Barbara Clark's chance of dying by 50 percent. In reality, the trials data presented at the American Society for Clinical Oncology in May 2005 shows just a 4 percent difference at four years.

More optimistic data from two North American trials has been presented but has not been subjected to peer review. And the drug can be very toxic to the heart. This seems very flaky evidence on which to fast track the drug above the many other drugs, not just for cancer, in which evidence is still being evaluated. Perhaps women with breast cancer are more of a vote winner.

Additionally worrying is the department of health (DoH) clarification, issued later on 5 October, which said: "Herceptin is still unlicensed for early stage breast cancer, so any prescription will be on specific individual circumstances and is a matter for a woman's doctor and her PCT board."

The DoH is simply passing the buck back to hard-pressed local NHS services which are expected to maintain financial control, to have costed local delivery plans looking three years ahead, and to make progress against a list of priorities and targets ranging from neighbourhood renewal through to cardiac surgery. Decisions should be based on evidence and value for money, services should be equitable, and deliberations should follow due process.

A day after Hewitt's announcement, the BBC's *Points West* featured another Somerset woman with breast cancer, who argued that her life was no less valuable than that of Barbara Clark. The Somerset PCT that granted exceptional funding for Ms Clark's treatment did so on the grounds that she was fostering a child with life-limiting illness but the pressure now to fund all women is huge. Trust medical directors around the country are contacting their PCTs asking for Herceptin funding while clinicians from other specialties are expressing outrage that this will undermine much needed funding for their own clinical services.



The government deserves some credit for improving cancer services in the UK, but very delicate and complicated rationing decisions made as a knee-jerk reaction to the media do no one any favours.

OLYMPICS

Ethics man

THERE has been some amusement at reports that Sir Stuart Lipton (pictured below), chairman of developer Stanhope, has been invited to address a meeting of Jewish businessmen on the subject of "ethical dilemmas in the property world".

Didn't Sir Stuart have to resign last year as chairman of the design quango, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (Cabe), over allegations of conflict of interest? Cabe had to give its unbiased view on two large London developments in which Sir Stuart's company, Stanhope, was the developer. Cabe's unbiased view was that they were both rather wonderful.

Sir Stuart may regale the businessmen in search of ethical enlightenment with a further dilemma he faced while chairman of Cabe.

His company, Stanhope, is a key partner in Stratford City Developments, a planned £4bn project in east London. The London Olympics needs part of the Stratford City site for the athletes' village in 2012. Documents obtained under the freedom of information act show that in 2003 Stratford City, of which Sir Stuart is a director, made a secret agreement with the Olympic team based on the principle of "not acting to frustrate" each other's planning applications.

Sir Stuart was still chairman of Cabe at the time. When it came to review the designs for the 2012 bid, Cabe concluded that the Olympics scheme was "a world-class masterplan" that would help to "transform the area". Meanwhile the Stratford City scheme, in Cabe's opinion, "melded very well with the Olympic proposals".

Busy Sir Stuart did not get round to registering his interest in the matter with the government until February 2004 – several months after the deal was done and after Cabe had scrutinised and approved both schemes twice.

Labour MP Clive Betts, a member of the select committee which last year investigated conflicts of interest at Cabe and found the quango lacking in transparency, wants parliament to scrutinise carefully all deals between the private and public sectors involving the Olympics.

The MPs concluded that "Cabe's opinion can have a significant impact on the value of land which is directly beneficial for a developer" and that Cabe design review meetings, as part of the planning process, should be held in public. The suggestion has not been taken up, and Cabe continues to hold these important meetings behind closed doors. But what is transparency in the planning process when there's Olympic gold at stake?

MISCARRIAGES

Forensic test

NEWS that the high court has blocked a bid by home office pathologist Michael Heath to stop a government disciplinary inquiry into his work has been met with much relief.

Some of Heath's colleagues are relieved because they were concerned about the standards of his forensic work; but so are a number of people who maintain that his conclusions contributed to their wrongful conviction in court.

Not least among these is Simon Hall (pictured right), serving life for the murder of an elderly Suffolk neighbour, Joan Albert (see *Eye* 1128). Readers will recall that Hall (whose MP has now joined the campaign to get his case reopened) had an alibi for all but half an hour on the night during which Joan Albert was stabbed with her own kitchen knife – including an alibi for the moment neighbours recorded hearing suspicious noises outside her house.

The timing of Mrs Albert's death was crucial in Hall's trial; but Michael Heath – who had not bothered to attend the crime scene and did not carry out a post-mortem examination until the following evening, a full 12 hours after the body had been found – had said it was not possible to determine the time of her death. Further evidence from a gastro-enterologist who said Mrs Albert died at about 3am – roughly the time of the disturbance and when Hall was happily partying in Ipswich – was not called at the trial.

Hall complained to the home office in February that had Heath attended the scene, as good practice encourages, he might have been better able to gauge the time of Mrs Albert's death. The following month, apparently triggered by complaints from other pathologists, it was decided that Heath, who has worked on high profile cases like the murders of Lin and Megan Russell, and that of Stephen Cameron, the road rage victim of Kenneth Noye, would face an inquiry following concerns about two cases which led to two men being jailed for the murder of their girlfriends.

In the first, Kenneth Fraser was arrested and charged after Heath concluded his girlfriend had been hit over the head. Fraser was freed when no fewer than four other pathologists detailed how she had in fact fallen downstairs. In another case, Stephen Pacua was convicted of killing his girlfriend after Heath said she had been asphyxiated. An appeal is pending after three other pathologists said she died from a drug-induced seizure.

Heath's attempt to launch a judicial review to stop the home office inquiry into his work was rejected in court; and Hall's legal team has now added its complaints to those being looked at by the home office inquiry team.

POST OFFICE

Protection racket

THE Post Office has moved a step closer to becoming a thrusting commercial venture with the launch of its own credit card.

Issuing plastic is the latest move into the personal finance market through a joint venture with the Bank of Ireland (BoI), started 18 months ago by Post Office chief executive and former HSBC banker David Mills. The idea is to cash in on the trustworthy public face of the post office while tapping into the bankers' financial brains. As Mills put it when announcing the sale of personal loans last year: "We are trusted by our customers who appreciate our commitment to providing straightforward, good value products and services."

Credit card customers will be offered the notorious payment protection insurance (PPI – see last *Eye*), although the Post Office assured Radio 4's *Money Box* programme that (unlike certain other banks) it wouldn't offer policies to people who could never claim on them. It can nevertheless expect to make a tidy profit from the scheme using BoI's experience of the product – though it probably won't want to dwell on its new partner's recent record.

Earlier this year Irish financial regulators found that BoI had overcharged 65,000 of its customers around 15 million euros by taking PPI premiums for periods after they had repaid their loans. How long will the Post Office be able to trade on its public-spirited reputation if it's chasing the kind of returns made by the usual over-chargers and mis-sellers?

● *On sale now – "My Friend Footy" by Richard Ingrams. Call 0870 750 1712 or order online from www.private-eye.co.uk* ●

BRITISH ENERGY

Generation game

"DON'T think this government's in the business of saying we're going to become heavy subsidisers of nuclear energy, because we aren't," energy minister Malcolm Wicks told the *FT* at the Labour conference as he announced the review of energy policy that is widely expected to see a shift to nuclear power.

Mr Wicks avoided any awkward questions about the heavy subsidy given by the government three years ago to the country's principal nuclear generator, British Energy plc, privatised by the Tories in 1996. Unable to let the company go bust with eight active nuclear power stations on the go, the government bailed it out with £650m of taxpayers' money. After another restructuring earlier this year that left shareholders with next to nothing, the company is now staging a recovery on the back of rising electricity and oil prices.

British Energy's history neatly illustrates the dilemma of a privately financed nuclear industry: the government can never wash its hands of it. Hence Wicks' comment that when any new programme begins "we would have to talk through the relationship between government and the market". The aim would presumably be arrangements with the private sector that didn't wreck the nuclear industry in the way that, say, Railtrack did the railways; and to avoid enormous public liabilities stretching decades into the future as the private finance initiative has created.

So who is the leading private sector figure in nuclear power who will have quite a say in these discussions? Step forward Adrian Montague (pictured below), chairman of British Energy.

As *Eye* readers will recall, Montague came to prominence as one of the architects of rail privatisation when he was a city lawyer, after which, in 1997, he was brought in by Labour to run the treasury's PFI taskforce. There he set the rules of the PFI game that made possible the vast returns for private companies, at the expense of taxpayers, that the *Eye* has often reported. Fresh from that success, in 2001 Montague went on to advise John Prescott on the much-criticised tube PPP deal that gave its bankers and lawyers a near half a billion pound payday and which is currently racking up handsome profits for the PPP companies while incurring maintenance and upgrade backlogs.

As with the "new" Labour favourites running the nuclear clean-up business (see *Eye* 1141), Montague is a prodigious multi-tasker. He also chairs Friends Provident, recruitment firm Michael Page and Crossrail; and cashes in on the PFI programme he did so much to create as chairman of Infrastructure Investors, a PFI investment fund owned by Barclays and French bank Société Générale (for whom he is also a "senior international adviser").

Just the man to have at the top of the nuclear industry as the government contemplates a huge expansion that will almost certainly rely heavily on the "market".

BNFL

Cleaning up all round

AFTER years of reorganisation to isolate its money-spinning parts and tee them up for privatisation (without ever admitting it was doing so), government-owned British Nuclear Fuels has finally put its plan for a sell-off to trade secretary Alan Johnson.

The announcement comes a few weeks after the company announced losses on its operations in 2004/05 of £144m. Happily for the prospects of a sell-off, chairman Gordon Campbell was on hand to explain that the related haemorrhaging of £438m cash was "a large but unsurprising figure, given that the expenditure on cleaning up the historic liabilities was £725m. Going forward, this expenditure will be financed by the NDA".

The NDA is the newly-created nuclear decommissioning authority that will retain all the old nuclear liabilities and remain publicly owned while the government flogs the part of BNFL, British Nuclear Group (BNG), that made profits of around £120m, mostly on decommissioning old sites without taking on any of the liabilities.

With the taxpayer saddled with the expensive and dangerous bits, private firms are eagerly eying up BNG. Current favourite for a big slice of the action is US contractor Fluor whose potential involvement, according to sources close to BNFL, was described by BNG chief executive Lawrie Haynes as "a match made in heaven".

Whether handing over the country's nuclear clean-up to Fluor would prove heavenly for anybody else is less certain. In one of its many run-ins with regulators and employees back home, a couple of months ago the firm was fined $395,000 by the US department of energy for "multiple and extensive violations of DOE's nuclear safety rules". Its attempts to clean up nuclear sludge demonstrated "numerous and long-term failures to comply with regulatory requirements".

Fluor, however, is well placed to ensure qualms over such matters don't harm its chances. It has donated $100,000 to the Transatlantic Nuclear Energy Forum, one of whose honorary chairs is ex-Labour cabinet minister-turned-lobbyist Jack Cunningham. And one of the company's directors is Lord Renwick, former British ambassador in Washington and Labour peer (he broke with the tradition that old civil servants remain independent), who may feel he's owed a favour. When other retired diplomats attacked Blair over Iraq a couple of years ago, Renwick steadfastly defended him.

Fluor now makes a mint from Iraq "reconstruction" work. It may not be long before it's cleaning up – in both senses – over here too.

SKIPTON BUILDING SOCIETY

Lost for words

WITH rip-offs by the big high street banks exposed almost weekly, punters may be tempted to turn to smaller mutual organisations they can trust. One such is Skipton Building Society, which prides itself on a long mutual history, promises to "serve the best interests of our customers and members" and boasts of "talking financial sense".

Skipton isn't so keen, however, on talking about its own financial disasters such as a recent venture, under the name of Callcredit plc, into the credit reference business. Set up in 1999 to compete with established credit like Experian, Callcredit has since lost around £30m for the society. Strangely these significant losses (the society only makes profits between £40m and £50m a year) don't warrant any mention in Skipton's annual report to members.

While chief executive John Goodfellow recounts "notable successes" among the society's subsidiary companies in 2004, including victory for its Pink Homeloans operation in the prestigious "Mortgage Introducer's Best Packager of the Year Award", there is no space to mention that in the same year £25m of members' money was sunk into Callcredit to keep it afloat.

Meanwhile another £10m was found earlier this year to buy a large stake in another precarious venture. The money will prop up a struggling New Zealand software company with a record of loss-

High principals

AS THE fallout from outgoing Doncaster College principal George Holmes's mismanagement begins to bite in the form of axed courses and staff redundancies, more tales emerge of his quixotic management style (*Eyes passim*).

In one of his rare excursions into the world of sweaty students, Holmes attended the drama department's final show, where the aspiring thesps get to strut their stuff. The principal was particularly taken with the performance of one mature but perfectly-formed student. So much so that at the end of the evening he went to the drama staff and informed them that the fragrant one's skills, poise and clear enunciation deserved nothing less than the award of a first-class degree.

For weeks afterwards Holmes could be seen engaged in intense *tête-à-têtes* with the talented 41-year-old mother of three in the student canteen. Sadly the philistine drama staff proved immune to Holmes's blandishments and unkindly awarded a 2:2.

But Holmes did not forget his protégée. In July, as the after-effects of Hurricane Holmes were beginning to be felt among students and staff, a front page article in the staff magazine announced that a certain Performance Art graduate was about to take the Edinburgh Festival by storm. The piece indicated that the famous festival was holding its collective breath in anticipation of her appearance, and included a photograph of the aspiring actress in an artistic pose. Alas, she appears to have sunk without trace.

WATERWORLD

Twin-trickery

SOUTHERN WATER is in a terrible hurry to build its new sewage works at Peacehaven on the south coast. So much so that it's submitted an appeal to government inspectors at the same time as resubmitting its application to local planners.

This is known as "twin-tracking" – bunging in a planning application and an appeal at the same time – and it was banned last year to stop unscrupulous developers from playing off local authorities against the planning inspectorate. With the implied threat of an expensive, time-consuming planning inquiry hovering in the background, local authorities could be bullied into giving permission right away.

Southern wants to build a £200m waste water treatment works at Peacehaven to treat the 95m litres of waste water produced by the people of Brighton and Hove. The site was chosen after a planning inquiry in 1999 rejected an alternative site at nearby Portobello. During that case the water company argued that the Peacehaven site was unsuitable as developing it would have an "unacceptable impact" on the landscape (*Eye* 1113).

Locals are not merely campaigning against the Peacehaven works, but some are pushing for a new-fangled sewage treatment system contained in watertight boxes on the seabed. This may or may not be the perfect not-in-my-back-yard solution, but it has been rejected by Southern Water.

Given the complexity of the Peacehaven application and the strength of local feeling against it, East Sussex and Brighton & Hove councils haven't been able to get through all the work within the 16-week period they are allowed to consider the first set of plans submitted, giving Southern the chance to appeal on grounds of "non-determination". Brighton MP Desmond Turner said he would normally criticise the councils for taking so long, but in the circumstances they hadn't been "unreasonably dilatory".

Turner is fuming at Southern's "duplicity" adding: "They have been responsible for massive delays in dealing with the sewage, leaving us with sea water that is less than clean and the liability of the government to fines because of Southern Water's incompetence."

In the City

THE thrown out prosecution of five former directors of SSL International over alleged "trade loading" – artificially boosting sales and profit numbers at the year or half year end by booking sales which have not actually been bought or delivered – may be more about the problems created by judges for complex fraud trials than the usual fall guys: uncomprehending jurors. This is indeed a problem as the government moves to replacing juries with judges alone from next year for trials such as that proposed for SSL.

The former chief executive, finance director and head of European operations and two other executives from the makers of Durex condoms and Scholl shoes were charged by the Serious Farce Office in 2003 with publishing false statements covering four sets of figures during 1999 and 2000. False or deceptive sales figures were said to have been reported with the intention of deceiving shareholders and creditors. Two other SSL executives were charged with alleged corruption in relation to two payments of £75,000 each made in 1999 to a former purchasing director of wholesalers AAH Pharmaceuticals.

"I'm the frog prince doing work experience in the City"

SSL – formed by the 1999 merger of London International Group and Seton Scholl Healthcare – told shareholders in 2001 that sales had been overstated by £22m and profits by £19m.

All those charged pleaded not guilty. So far so normal. But then in December the SFO case began to go off the rails and by July had completely left the track. In pre-trial hearings, Judge Stephen Clarke sitting at Knutsford crown court threw out the accounting charges first against the top three SSL directors, then against the two other directors and finally (and perhaps not surprisingly given his two previous rulings) dismissed the corruption charges.

Dismissing the second set of false accounting charges the judge said: "This court cannot say the evidence is anywhere near sufficient to go to a jury… The prosecution's evidence is not sufficient for a jury to properly convict."

Clarke's decision so infuriated the SFO it has taken the unprecedented action of seeking a voluntary bill of indictment – asking a high court judge to restore the charges against all six former defendants on the basis that the judge was wrong in law. The SFO had already made up its mind not to accept Clarke's ruling before the wave of "SFO humiliated" style headlines.

Two of the former directors failed in an attempt to prevent the voluntary bill proceedings going ahead last month, claiming that the SFO was "acting in an unreasonable manner" and seeking to have a "second or third bite at the cherry".

The judge did not share the SFO's view that the "trade loading" was by design deceptive and questioned the ability of a jury to wade through the invoices concerned with the inflation of sales figures. Perhaps he had in mind the collapse of the Wickes trial which involved another accounting trick involving undisclosed rebates.

"Trade loading" involves offering big discounts to customers to take large stocks of goods, more than they want or need at the time, so that the sales can be booked for a specific company quarter, especially at the financial year end. Often the goods are not delivered but remain with the supplier. The customer pays no interest or storage costs pending delivery.

It is a win-win situation. The supplier gets to boost sales and profits figures so hitting the all-important numbers expected by the stock market. The customer gets the goods cheaply and so can increase profits at no extra cost thereby hitting their numbers.

But as the goods do not leave the factory or warehouse, they have not really been sold and so that revenue and profit should not be recognised. If it is, then sales and profits have been artificially inflated; and once done there is pressure to repeat and repeat so creating a bigger and bigger distortion. If the customer suddenly decides it has more than it needs, then sales suddenly drop or, as happened with SSL, an investigation results in a restatement of results.

"Trade loading" is also referred to in business as "channel stuffing". But whereas the normal justification for "channel stuffing" is to ensure that key customers are never without stock so that they do not buy elsewhere and is a year round activity, the motivation and execution of the year end-style "trade loading" complained about at SSL is very different. If the aim is to keep the customer happy that is considered legitimate. But if the intention is to inflate figures and so "cook the books", that cannot be legitimate, say accountancy experts.

Explaining his initial decision to dismiss the false statement charges against the three main former SSL directors, Judge Stephen Clarke declared: "The evidence in this case points overwhelmingly to the company indulging in trade loading. It was a common feature of how Seton conducted their business prior to merger with Scholl and also common to LIG. The practice continued when SSL was created." Trade loading accounted for £63m by March 2001.

Those who SSL trade loaded with most were chemist chains Boots and Unichem, as well as AAH. Boots and Alliance Unichem (deputy chairman Tory leadership candidate Ken Clarke) are about to merge.

"It can have the benefit to the supplier of inflating sales figures and enables targets to be met but it can also have very real advantages to the customer," said the judge. "Of course excessive trade loading may give an unrealistic picture of profitability. However, it has to be stressed that trade loading is not illegal and forms part of conventional trading."

For Clarke the clincher was that SSL's auditor – who else but Arthur Andersen (RIP) – had known and done nothing. "No expert evidence is forthcoming from the accountants or the auditors as to the falsity of the accounts or their capacity to mislead. The evidence certainly indicates that the auditors were made aware of the trade load situation… The auditors were in a position if they wished to make any check of the underlying nature of the transactions."

The problem with that argument is that Andersen is subject to an investigation by the beancounters' regulator, the Joint Disciplinary Scheme, over its performance in adding up the SSL numbers. That probe has been on hold pending the criminal case. Events currently mirror those at Wickes where, despite the acquittals in the SFO case, Andersen was hit with a £1.1m bill for fines and costs by the JDS over its failure to detect and prevent the inflation of the DIY chain's figures by £53m.

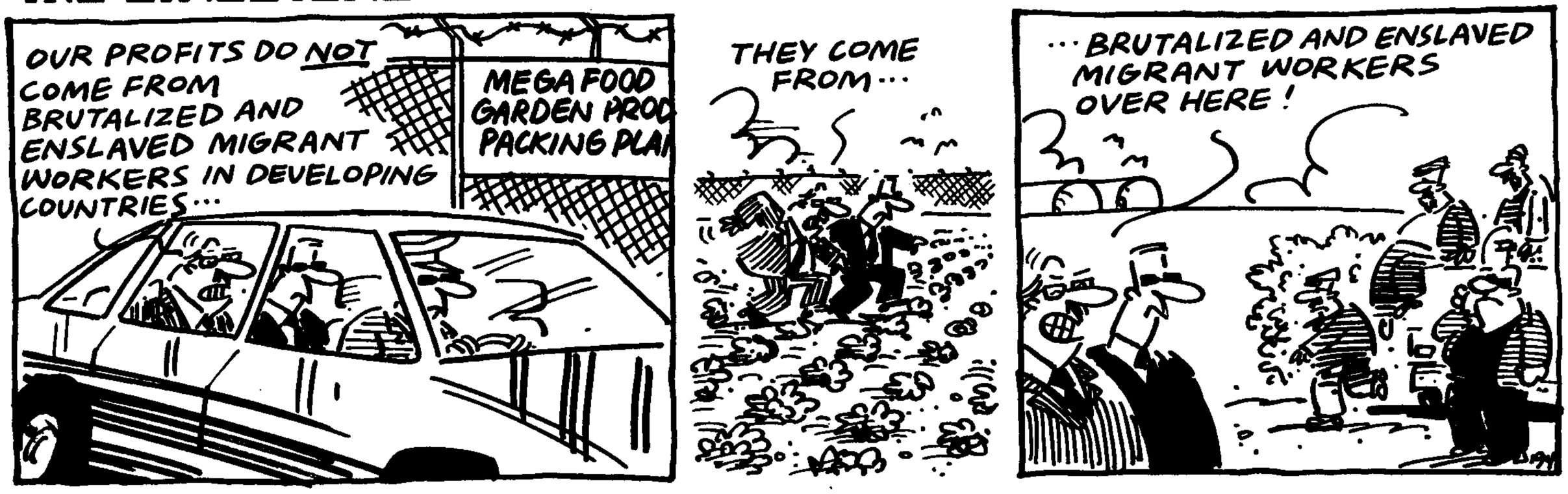
Another puzzle created by the judge's decision is the issue of the two alleged £75,000 payments made to the former AAH executive which formed the basis of the two corruption charges. If the "trade loading" was just business as usual, why were such alleged payments necessary? If not for advancing sales orders, what was the justification for the alleged payments? All matters likely to be discussed in the high court next month as part of the SFO bid to restore the charges via a judicial review of the acquittals in the SSL case. Perhaps it is time some clear guidance was given to auditors about just when acceptable "channel stuffing" becomes unacceptable "trade loading".

THE tax problems of Dutch postal and logistics group TNT NV may not bode well for auditors PricewaterhouseCoopers. Questions may well be raised about what if any tax advice PwC provided to TNT and also the treatment of any tax-driven arrangements by the auditor. TNT would appear to be the target of a wide-ranging investigation by the Inland Revenue into the kind of tax avoidance tactics regularly used by multi-nationals designed to reduce profits in high tax areas by creating charges against those profits from outside the UK.

TNT disclosed last month that it has found evidence of possible illegal tax-related transactions at subsidiaries in the UK and elsewhere. Estimates

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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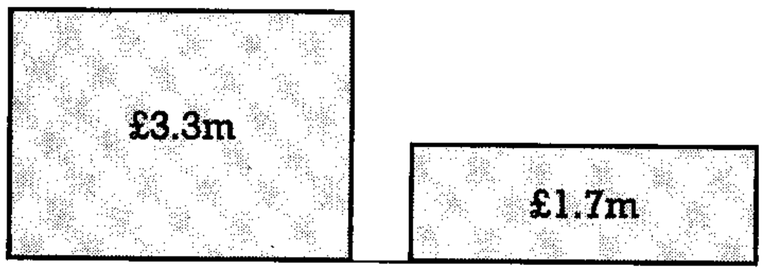
Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Marconi's broken record

Chief exec Mike Parton's timely share sale...



...value of the shares he dumped a year ago

...what they're worth now

of the liabilities are as high as £270m.

TNT UK has been the subject of two heavyweight investigations by the Revenue. It says that the second investigation has now been settled. The first involved group tax relief arrangements. The second concerned the payment of licence fees. Both arrangements would have had the effect of reducing the UK corporation tax liability.

The 2003 accounts for TNT UK disclosed that the company had a corporation tax liability from as long ago as 1997 on which it will now also face interest and penalties. This resulted in a reduction in profits of £4.7m with £9.2m reclassified as corporation tax instead of a debt to a group company.

TNT UK took over its then parent TNT Express in June 1996. It was then taken over by the Dutch postal group PTT Nederland in December 1996. The company showed profits of £43.5m and a tax charge of £18m for the 18 months to December 1997.

However, the issue of license fees paid to another group company outside the UK seems a much bigger problem. The company reached a deal with the Revenue on the tax treatment of these fees during 2003; but that agreement has been reopened. This is expected to impact on the amount of tax relief claimed by the group from 1999. A year ago TNT UK made a provision of almost £19m. The Revenue has been examining the licence fee issue since 2002 but last year extended into other tax areas including the company's immediate UK parent company TNT Holdings (UK).

PwC estimated that the effect of meeting new tax claims over fees paid since 1998 could be up to £20m. But that was then. Now it seems the figures for the UK and other countries could be much higher. Not such a good advertisement for one of the challengers to the Royal Mail monopoly.

QUESTIONS are also being raised about the accounts of major advertising agencies after the US group Interpublic restated its results last month to take account of $184.5m in "volume discounts" from TV, radio and publishing groups which were not passed on to their clients.

The discounts, often by way of cash-back deals given for large block bookings of space or time, are not illegal. But if the clients are not informed or reimbursed it could be argued that is an unfair practice that inflates agency profits. Some global advertisers such as Procter & Gamble forced agencies to repay the discounts when they learned of the arrangements.

According to Interpublic, the practice is not unknown in Britain but is more common in Continental countries, although banned in France and Latin America.

So far no comment has been made on the "volume discount" issue by Interpublic's major US rival Omnicom or its biggest British competitor, WPP. This is no doubt because both Omnicom and WPP do not engage in such questionable if legal tactics and so have no need to restate their figures.

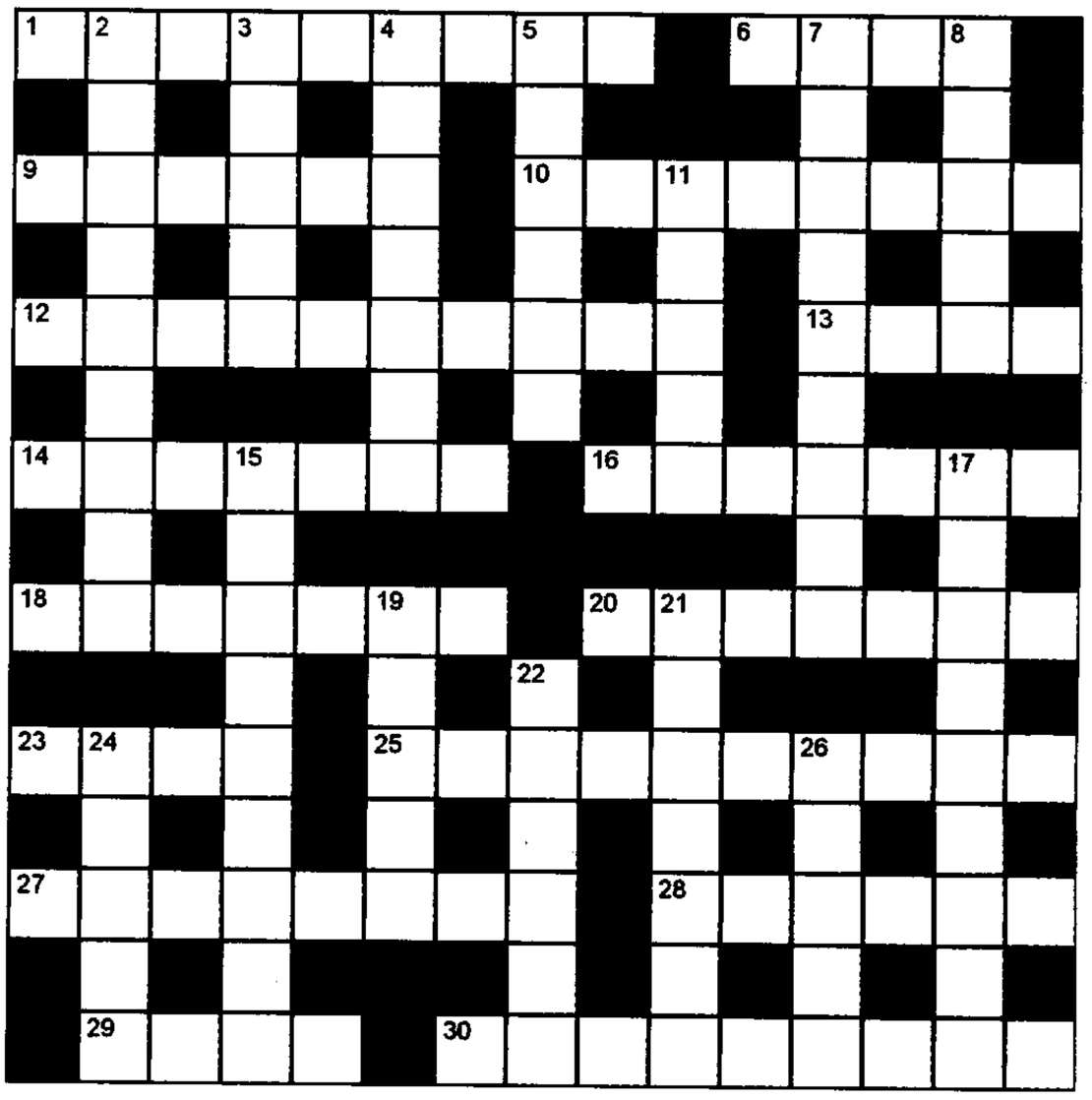
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 298

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 October 2005

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/28 It's rather pawsh means of revealing the government's intentions (3,6,6)
6 National player takes Mermaid's lead, playing the Queen (4)
9 He didn't follow Clinton advice initially: "head from Lewinsky – bloody hard stuff" (2,4)
10 Not even rubbish will do for whackos (8)
12 Say, a drug-induced session gets end of the bollocks (5,5)
13/29 State of old queen clinging on to youth (name suppressed) (8)
14 Like the web user's agent grabbing unconscious Brenda (7)
16 Cyclops is a fruity thing making charge (7)
18 House of Windsor? Extremely dirty and obnoxious! (7)
20 President, once fat, pathetic lover (7)
23 Getting right one in Intelligence, a potential nightmare for Bush? (4)
25 *Private Eye* covers "Bishop left in debt" to be seen everywhere (10)
27 Without thought gives joint to Charlie (4-4)
28 See 1
29 See 13
30 As a course might be be rapidly executed in US prison? (4-5)

DOWN

2 The bloke'll peak before a year, with terrible consequences (4,2,3)
3 Soundbite Queen, second to suck off toe (5)
4 Old German prince preferred love with scrubber finally (7)
5 Corner that is for coy sex (6)
7 Warning: a large member on cartoonist (5,4)
8 Less ruddy tongue action over Brenda! (5)
11/22 Coupling of politicians designed to get the voters interested? (5,6)
15 Bloke as broad as Dr Silver, the powerful board member (4,5)
17 Our Brian's despised erection ... (9)
19 ... straight up, without Camilla's lead – that should stop the quarrelling (5)
21 A heavy rub ordered to get sire aroused (7)
22 See 11
24 Learn tossing of the organ (5)
26 The Real IRA, lacking guts, drops one of them (5)

Crossword 297 winner: MIKE MITCHELL

ACROSS: 7/20 Shit-for-brains 8 Enfield 9 Ogle 10 Rough trade 12 Bed bug 13 Maharaja 15 Coke 16 Pin-up 17 Smut 18 Starfish 21 Clodhopper 23 Kill 24 In power 25 Boorish.

DOWN: 1 Shagged out 2 Atremble 3 Toerag 4 On the hop 5 Mirror 6 Plod 11 Upmanship 14 Journalist 16 Prisoner 17 Starkers 19 Red-hot 20 Burrow 22 Link.

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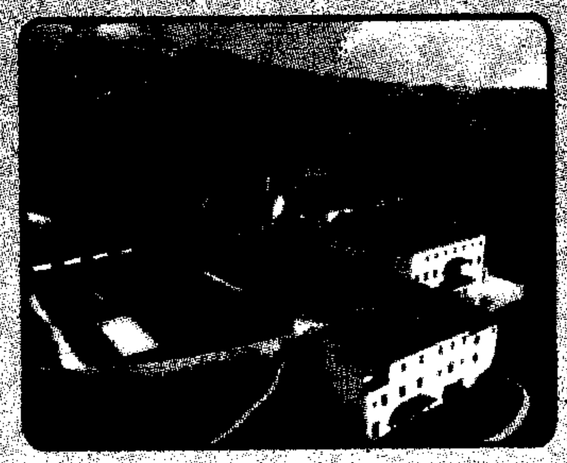

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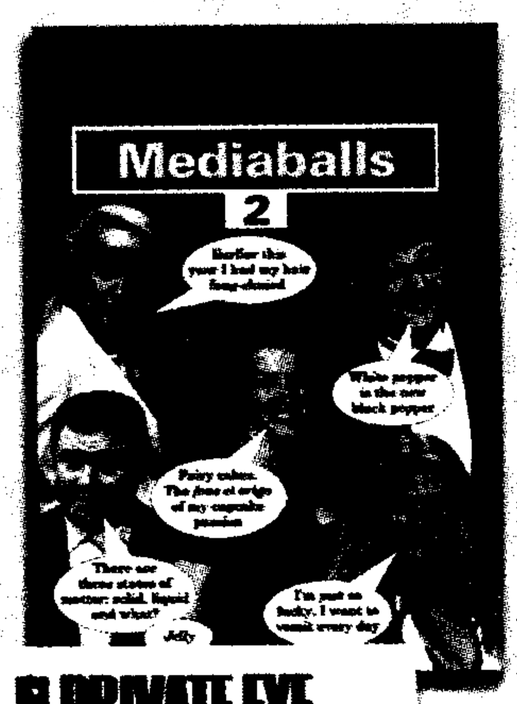

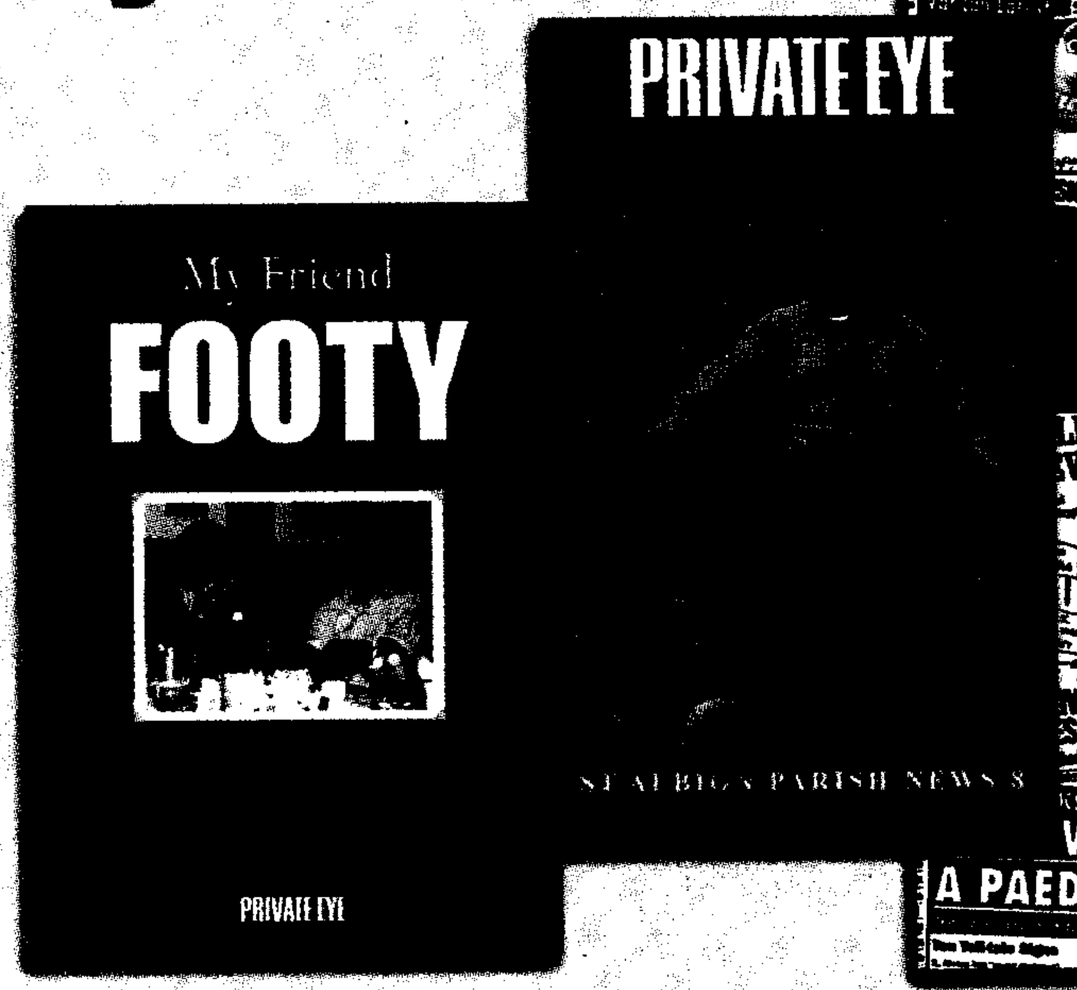

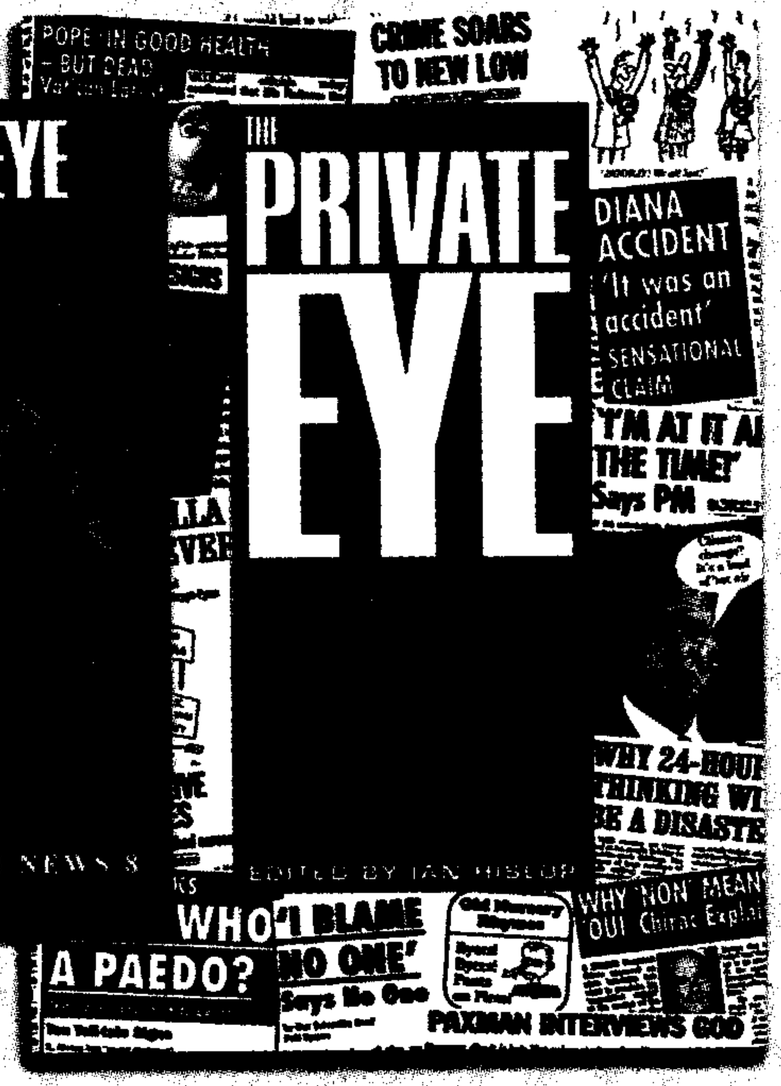
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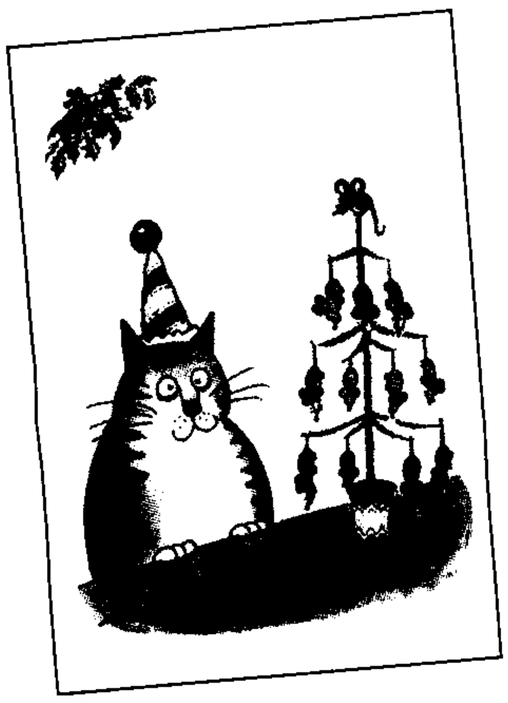

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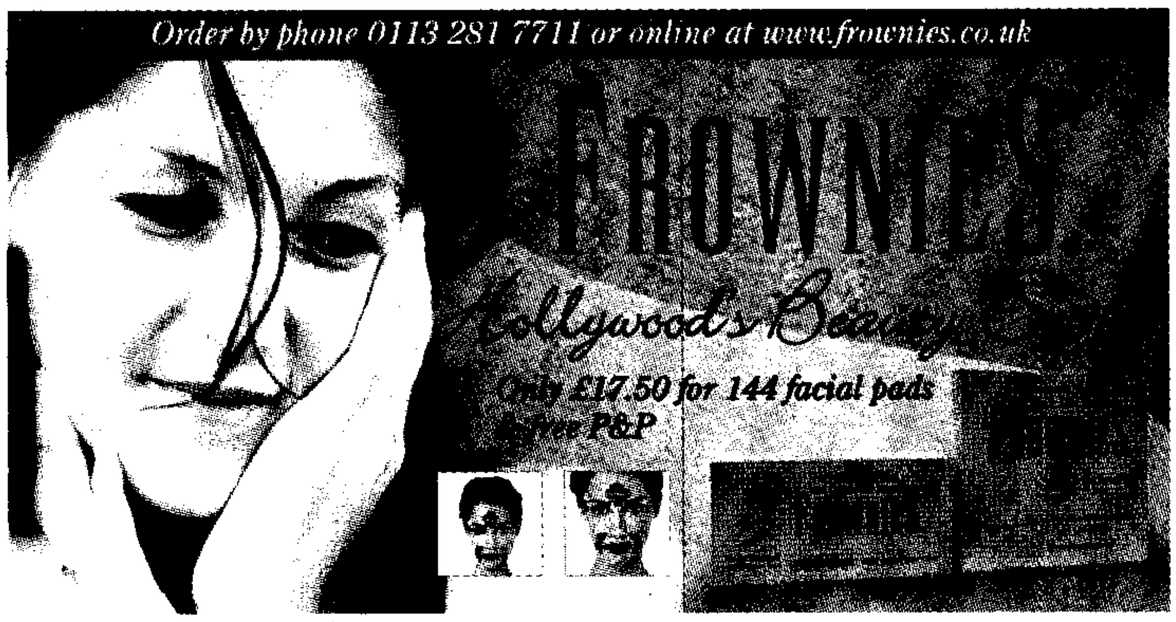
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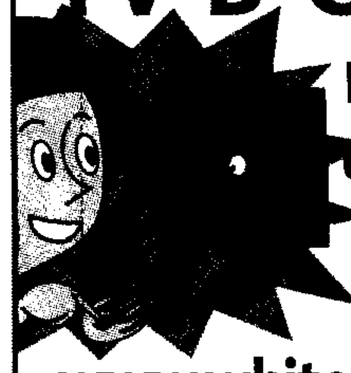
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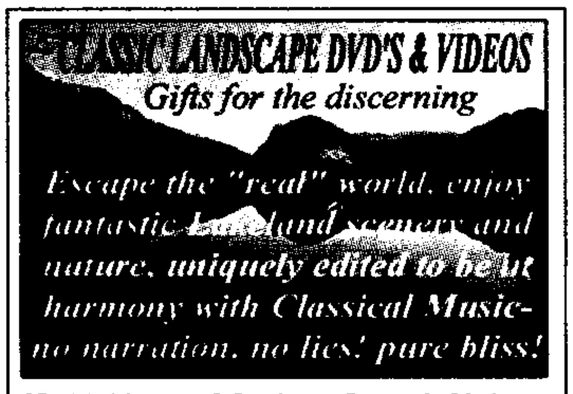
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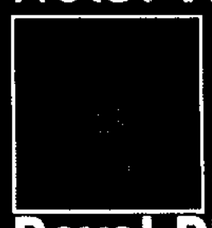
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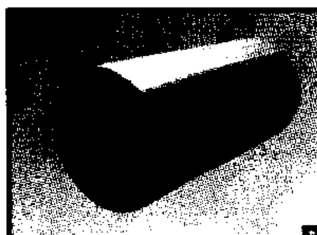
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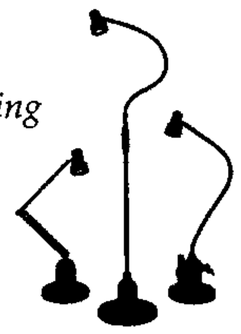

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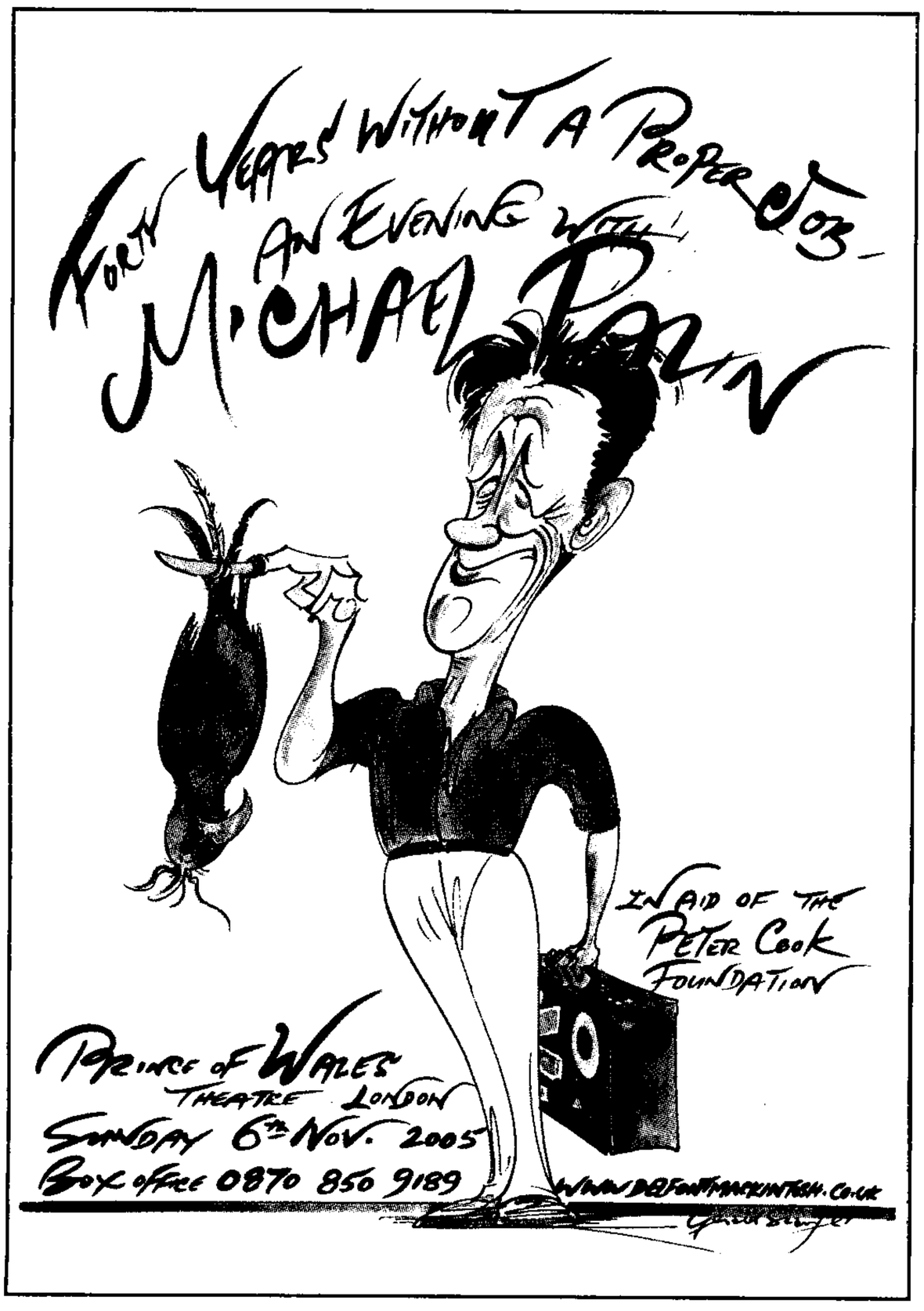
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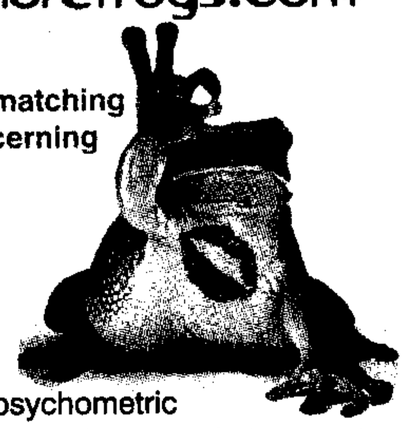

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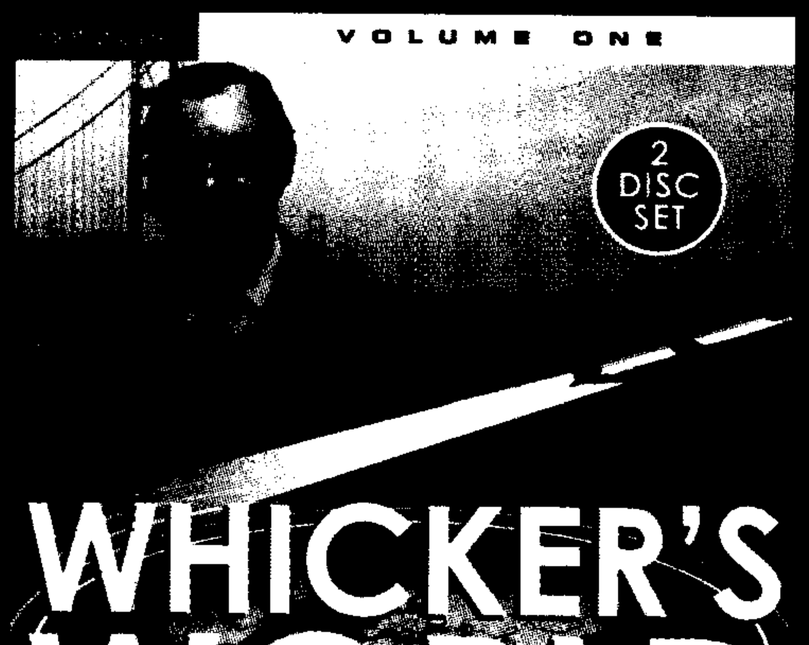

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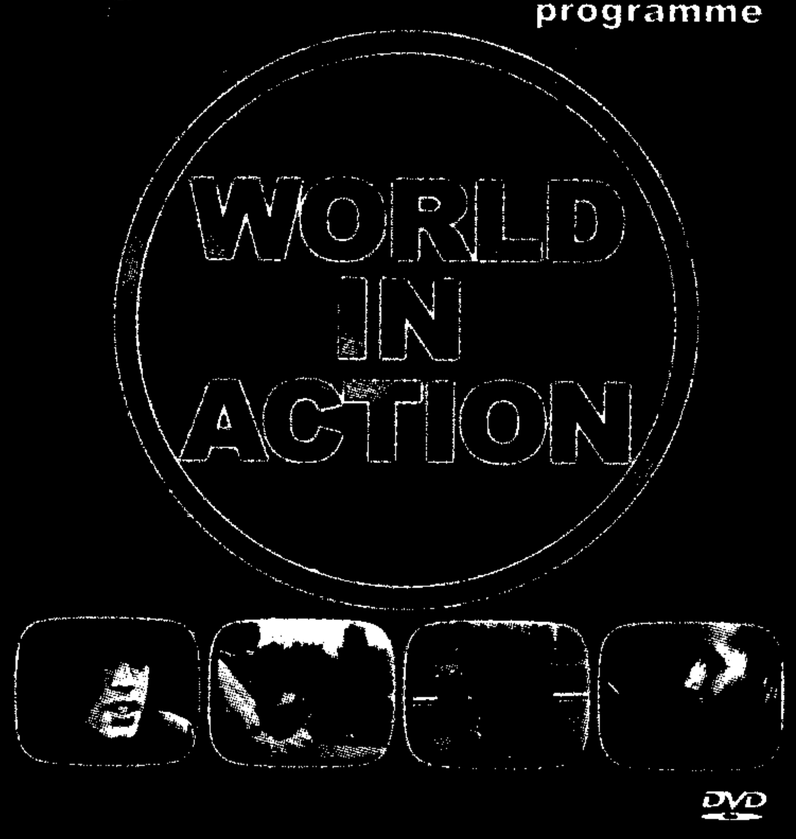

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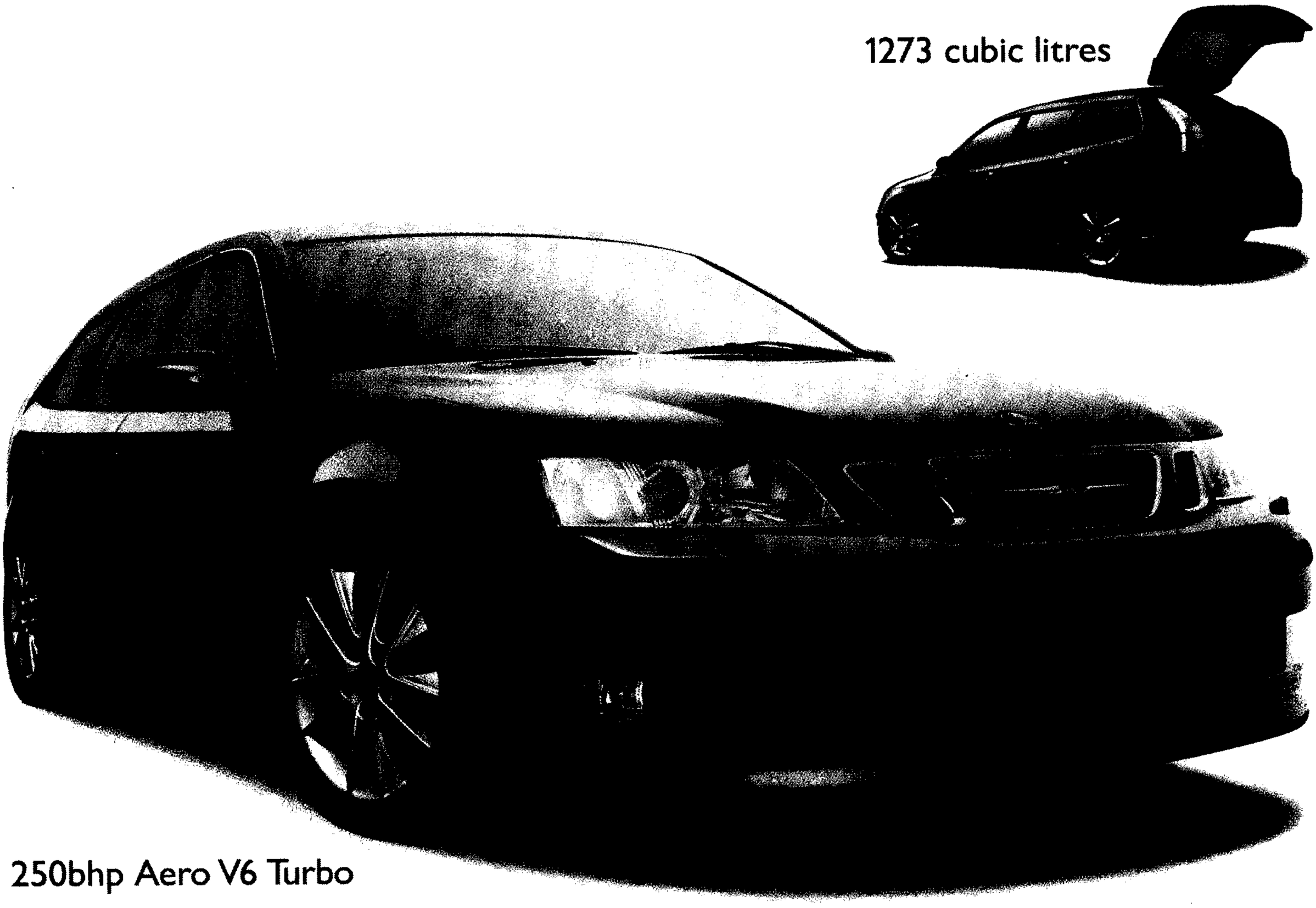

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A large boot shouldn't stop you from getting your kicks. And the all-new 9-3 Aero V6 SportWagon generates 350Nm of torque, so there is no more powerful V6 petrol engine in its class. Turbocharged power that's controlled by ReAxs all-wheel steering allied to a responsive and agile chassis. All in all it's a very moving experience. For a test drive text 'SAAB' to 60030† or call 0845 300 9395.

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The all-new Saab 9-3 SportWagon.

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OFFICIAL FUEL CONSUMPTION FIGURES FOR SAAB 9-3 SPORTWAGON RANGE IN MPG (LITRES/100KM): URBAN 16.4 (17.2) – 39.2 (7.3), EXTRA URBAN 38.2 (7.4) – 62.8 (4.5), COMBINED 25.7 (11.0) – 51.4 (5.5), CO_2 EMISSIONS 149 – 264 G/KM. Model illustrated Saab 9-3 Aero V6 SportWagon with optional alloy wheels (ALU65) – on-the-road price £29,095. †Charge for text will be at users' normal network rate.